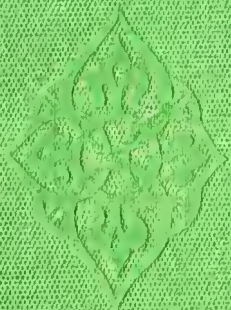


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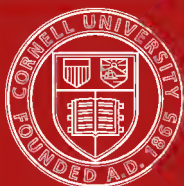
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SCENES
IN THE
LIFE OF ST. PETER.

SCENES
IN THE
LIFE OF ST. PETER.

A BIOGRAPHY AND AN EXPOSITION.

BY
JAMES SPENCE, M.A., D.D.
Of the University of Aberdeen.

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PREFACE.

MUCH has been done in modern religious literature for the life and labours of St. Paul, but comparatively little for the life of St. Peter. This apparent neglect may have partly arisen from the false position assigned to him in the opinions of a large portion of Christendom. But, in the very fact that a superstitious and mythical interest has gathered around his name, there is the greater need for a Scriptural delineation of his character, and a complete view of the facts of his history so far as they are authenticated. The following pages contain an attempt in this direction; not merely to follow the facts of St. Peter's life as they are recorded in the New Testament, but also to give a brief account and exposition of all that he did, said, and wrote, as a man and an apostle of the Lord. The

subject is one of much interest, not only to the individual Christian, but to the church at large. The author is conscious that his effort comes far short of the dignity and importance of the subject ; but, such as it is, he desires humbly to commend it to the blessing of the Master of “ the holy company of the apostles,” the living Head of the church.



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CHAPTER I.

PETER'S INTRODUCTION TO JESUS.

Ancient prophecy in its connexion with Galilee.—I. Bethsaida and its fishermen—Andrew and Peter—The preaching of John the Baptist—Its influence on Peter—Testimony of the Baptist to Jesus—Peter brought to Christ—The first evening with Jesus—The grand discovery—The new name—Peter a disciple.—II. Gennesaret—The Saviour there—The unsuccessful fishermen—Jesus in Peter's boat—The miraculous sign—Its result—The word of encouragement and commission—The willing surrender—Peter an apostle—Lessons.

“Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.”—*John* i. 35—42.

“And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, and saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: and so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.”—*Luke* v. 1—11.

[Compare *Matt.* iv. 18—22; *Mark* i. 16—18.]

PETER'S INTRODUCTION TO JESUS.

MANY ages before the time at which the Gospel narrative begins, the prophet Isaiah had spoken of the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and of Galilee of the nations, as a region that was to be signally favoured in the course of sacred story.* The people who walked in darkness were to see a great light, and to be filled with joy. The epoch of this predicted glory came during the first advent of the Son of God ; and Galilee of the Gentiles found its culminating honour in the Divine footsteps and wonderful works of the Incarnate One. There, under the shadow of Lebanon with its cedars, and Hermon with its snowy peaks, and those ancient hills which had once echoed the triumphant strains of Deborah and Barak, were nursed the devoutest zeal, the warmest patriotism, and the liveliest hope amongst the Jews. There, far removed from the mingled despotism and corruption of the schools and court of Jerusalem, in a region from which, in the judgment of the chief priests and scribes, no prophet could arise, were found the strongest yearnings after the predicted future, and the strongest hopes of the promised Deliverer. The people there were not yet hardened into cold formalism by the traditions of the

* Isa. ix. 1, 2.

Pharisees, and devout piety towards the God of Israel had a place and a power over their hearts and minds. Many amongst them looked for redemption in Israel.

In that region, on the shores of the Lake of Gennesaret, there was a little fishing village named Bethsaida (House of Fish), which was the birthplace of one who, perhaps more than any other mere man, has filled the world with the influence of his name. Of this village there are now no remains by which even its site can be identified: the place has passed away for ever, although it was the scene of many of the Redeemer's mightiest works, and, with some other places, the subject of his most solemn warnings. It was, however, near to Capernaum, on the north-west shore of this little inland Sea of Tiberias. Amongst the natives of this village, who pursued their humble avocation as fishermen, were three friends, two of whom were brothers. These had been drawn from their own immediate neighbourhood southward, down the banks of the Jordan, to hear the wonderful Prophet who was arousing the whole of Judea by his preaching, and was baptizing multitudes of the people unto repentance.

Of these three men we single out Peter, to make his history the subject of thought and discussion in these chapters. He was one of those who, whilst waiting in devout expectation for the coming Deliverer, were brought under the influence of John the Baptist. Thus he came to be introduced to Him on whose words and looks he soon learned to hang; whom he learned to follow and adore and serve as his Master and Lord; growing in virtue and strength, in devotion and enthusiasm, even through failure,

tears, and forgiveness, until he became the most prominent of the sacred band whom Christ called around him as his apostles.

In this first chapter we have simply to consider the circumstances connected with Peter's introduction to the Lord Jesus and his subsequent call to the apostleship. Historically, there was a preparation for service, and shortly after a consecration to it.

I. The whole of Judea and the region beyond Jordan was aroused by the preaching of John the Baptist. He flashed like a meteor across the moral and religious horizon, startling the thoughtless multitudes into at least a transient anxiety, as he hurled thundering denunciations against the formality, hypocrisy, and wickedness of the age. He was as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness," summoning the people to penitence and reformation, and thus preparing "the way of the Lord."* The fame of his energy and influence had reached even the quiet fishing villages on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias. Some of the fishermen, wondering whether this was not the promised Shiloh, and devoutly longing and looking for his appearance, were drawn from their seclusion to listen to the fervid utterances of this new preacher. He was then in the neighbourhood of Bethabara on the banks of the Jordan, somewhere near the plains of Jericho ; and these fishermen came from their homes to hear him. For nearly forty years, it is supposed, Simon had lived on the shores of Gennesaret before the events occurred which drew him forth from his retirement, and changed the entire course of his life.

* Isa. xl. 3 compared with Matt. iii. 3.

Jesus, after his baptism by John, had retired into the wilderness, there to pass through a fiery ordeal, which was to prepare him for his public manifestation, and to fit him, by the experience of temptation, to succour the tempted in every age.* But the prince of this world found nothing in him. As the vanquisher of Satan, and the Lord to whom the angels adoringly ministered, he had come back to where the Baptist was preaching, and at the time when our narrative begins he was walking in silence by the Jordan, awaiting perhaps the further guidance of his Father. His forerunner must first bear witness to him, and his testimony is now ready. John points him out as he thus walks, in the memorable words, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me."† Yet no one seems then to have followed him. On the next day, however, when the Baptist repeated his testimony, two disciples who were at that time with him proceeded to follow this "Lamb of God." One of the two was Andrew, and the other, in all probability, was St. John, who never alludes to himself by name.‡ They follow him in silence, making no request, and venturing on no introduction of their own. But Jesus "turned, and saw them following," and addressed them in affectionate words, "What seek ye?" The tone was not repulsive, nor was the question a forbidding one. They could not yet say, "We seek thyself, the

* Heb. iii. 17, 18.

† John i. 29, 30.

‡ John i. 40, 41. Dean Alford thinks, and with reason, that it was the Evangelist himself. Greek Test. *in loc.*

Messiah," for they were not sure of this; but, "Rabbi, where dwellest thou? We would know more of thee. We desire to be with thee, and hear thee, and learn of thee. We wish to enter into nearer and closer fellowship with thee." And "he saith unto them, Come and see." What an hour in their history was this! what a crisis in their being and destiny! "Come," said Jesus: there was both a permission and a welcome there, a gracious invitation and a merciful encouragement. And the same Saviour is still saying, "Come," to the sinful, sorrowing, and anxious children of men, offering like invitation and encouragement to all.

These two disciples of John the Baptist "came and saw where He abode;" but Jesus had much more than this in his mind for them. It was not enough to to see where he dwelt: they "abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour," or four o'clock in the afternoon. They saw as much as they might then see in him. They beheld something of his glory, full of grace and truth. They found that which they sought and longed to find.

What a wonderful evening that must have been to these two disciples—this first evening with Jesus the Incarnate Son of God! What they heard that night is not revealed to us; but we may be well assured it was a night of glorious revelation, and of thrilling interest to them. It was so impressive and so blessed, that the influence of the interview was unmistakably manifest in Andrew on the following day. So full was he of the interview with Jesus, and so great had been its power on himself, that the first thing he did was to go and seek his brother Simon,

earnestly wishing to communicate to him what he knew, and to make him share in the sacred joy with which the knowledge had filled his own soul. True religion is ever thus communicative: he who finds Christ for himself is always ready and willing to proclaim him to others. No sooner had Andrew found Simon than he exclaimed, "We have found the Messias." Truly the *eureka* of Archimedes was nothing to this discovery, the grandest that could be made by man. All the symbols of Moses, all the visions of the prophets, all the hopes of the holy in every age, centred in the Messiah; and now they had found him! There was no hesitation, no doubt about it. That one night's interview with Jesus was enough to produce the strong and abiding conviction that he was the very Christ. Nor was Andrew satisfied with merely telling his brother of the great discovery. There was an introduction to be afforded, as well as information given. "He brought him to Jesus:" words of inimitable simplicity and force. Worldly friendships are often selfish: we may not wish others to be intimate with our familiar friends; we would have their love and intimacy all to ourselves: but the fellowship which the soul has with Christ inspires the wish that all may know him and love him, especially those most nearly related to us. Peter was thus introduced to Christ by his brother. What would an introduction to the palace of the Cæsars have been, compared with this? With what excited soul and inquiring gaze Peter would at first look on Him who was declared to be the Messias. This was the turning point of his life, the very crisis of his being. And in truth it is so in every man's history, when he is

brought for the first time to Jesus. And blessed is it to have a brother or friend who knows the Saviour, and who is earnest and anxious to bring us to him.

The interest of this interview to Peter was immense. "Jesus beheld him," looked on him. The word in the original is expressive of more than merely seeing: it means looking with a penetrating gaze. Jesus read his character, saw by his omniscience and Divine intuition what he was and what he would be. He "needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man." The whole of Peter's character and feelings was known at once. Although the Saviour had never seen him before, he pronounces his name and parentage. "Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation [Peter], A stone." As if he had said, "I know thee who thou art, and what thou hast been from thy birth till now. I give thee thy new name; for I know what I shall make thee in discipleship to me, and for my kingdom." The word "Simon" means *Hearer*, and "Jona" means *Dove*; but it is an over-refinement to seek spiritual meaning and mystery in these names, as some have done. The new name Peter, however, was given with a special design, and has strong and deep meaning in it. We know from sacred history that Abram, Sara, and Jacob received new names, with special import, in reference to the covenant and promises of God to them. And the new name here given to Simon had a relation, perhaps, to his peculiar natural character, but especially to the future that was before him. He was to be the rock-man, the instrumental foundation of the church of the living God. In Peter himself there were energy,

impetuousness, and strength; and in his work there would be everything to warrant his new name, and fully show its propriety and force.

It is worthy of observation that Peter, who in so large a part of Christendom has had a false position assigned him, and a superstitious regard paid to his memory, was not the first to be with Christ. In this respect he was not the first of the apostles, but was introduced to Jesus by his own brother Andrew; so that there is no hint of any pre-eminence to be assigned to him. After this introduction to Christ, and the reception of his new name, Peter returned with his brother to Bethsaida and to his fishing nets. What new subjects for thought and prayer had he received from this first interview with the Lord! He had actually hailed Jesus as the Messiah, and had in heart and purpose enrolled himself as his disciple. Would he and the other fishermen who had accompanied him forget Bethabara and the Jordan? Would they not often beguile their midnight hours on the lake, as they pursued their calling, by talking of Him who had been pointed out to them, and whom they believed to be "the Lamb of God"? Thoughts of him were not incongruous with the engagements of their daily secular work. Jesus filled their hearts and inspired their hopes, while they continued diligently to labour at their calling, mending their nets, casting them into the lake, or bringing the fish which they had caught to the shore. And certainly Peter could not forget the omniscience which had scanned his character, nor the grace that had given him his new name. He might not, indeed, be able to understand all

which that new name involved ; but it could not fail to stir his thoughts and to fan his hopes. Its meaning was to be unfolded by-and-by. Nor was he left without something to strengthen his faith in Jesus before the next personal interview with him. A miracle recently performed on a nobleman's son at Capernaum, and the turning of the water into wine at the marriage feast at Cana, could not fail to reach his ears and confirm his confidence in the Divinity and glory of the Saviour's mission. Yet he would doubtless long to hear for himself the Master's voice, and look into his countenance again. The opportunity and privilege of this converse were not far off.

We do well to remember, as a practical truth for ourselves, that every one who becomes a disciple of Christ really receives from him a new name. He is henceforth a Christian ; and never until this personal introduction is he truly so. Thereby, also, he becomes a son of God : "To them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."* Oh that his disciples more earnestly and constantly sought to bear worthily their new name ! How different then would be the aspect of the church and its influence on the world.

II. We now come to consider Peter's call to the apostleship, his consecration to special public service. The scene is changed from the Jordan and its banks to the Sea of Gennesaret, with its pebbly beach,—

" Where rippling wave and dashing oar
The midnight hymn attend,
Or whispering palm-leaves from the shore
With midnight silence blend."

* John i. 12.

On the shores of this little inland sea some of the most thrilling and wonderful events of the world's history took place. It is a region crowded above all others in sacred story with undying and glorious memories. We can see in imagination the rugged and barren mountains which threw their shadows on the placid bosom of the lake, as in hoary grandeur they approached its waters, or receded to a greater distance from the shore. We can portray to ourselves the future teachers of the world, mending their nets or mooring their boats on its beach, as they diligently and humbly pursued their daily toil, little knowing what was to be their course in after-life.

It was probably some months after the first interview, and towards the close of the same year,* that our Lord, who had recently returned to Galilee, was walking alone upon the shore of Gennesaret. It seems also to have been early in the morning, just as men were waking up to life. Activity and bustle had begun in the streets of Capernaum, and the fishermen who had been out "all night" were returning to the land with their spoil. The presence of Jesus soon became known, and multitudes crowded around him to hear from his lips the word of God. Four of the fishermen who had been unsuccessful had reached the shore, and were in the act of washing their nets before repairing to their homes, when Jesus, who had seen their fruitless toil, approached.† Their boats had been hauled up on the beach; but the Saviour, wishing to withdraw from the

* But see Greswell's "Dissertation on the Harmony of the Gospels," and Andrews on the Life of our Lord, who place the call of Peter in the following spring.

† Luke v. 1—11.

pressure of the throng, entered the one which belonged to Peter. Jesus "prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land." The lake, so often agitated by storms, and lashed to fury by the winds which came sweeping down from the mountains, was now calm. Gathering crowds lined the shore, and Jesus of Nazareth, the great object of curiosity or interest, sat in quiet majesty in Peter's boat, and spoke the words of life to the people. How truly, on this and on all occasions, did he prove himself to be meek and lowly minded! When the discourse was closed, and the multitude for the time dismissed, the circumstances come before us, which we have now specially to consider in connexion with the call or consecration of Peter.

Jesus gave first a miraculous sign. As, by a kind of typical expression, reference had been made once and again to fishermen in the visions which the prophets saw,* now the symbol was to give place to the reality. "Launch out into the deep," said Jesus to Simon, "and let down your nets for a draught." "Master," was the reply—for Peter now knew to call Jesus "Master"—"we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net."

" 'The livelong night we've toiled in vain;
But at thy gracious word
I will let down the net again:
Do thou thy will, O Lord.'
So spake the weary fisher, spent
With bootless darkling toil;
Yet, on his Master's bidding bent,
For love, and not for spoil."

* Jer. xvi. 16; Ezek. xlvii. 10.

Peter obeyed the command of Jesus, evidently more from a reverence for his person than from any hope or belief which he had in a successful result. Yet how much is there in the simple, prompt, and sincere obedience expressed in the utterance, "nevertheless at thy word." This was the language of a true disciple. There was no questioning or cavilling, no demur or hesitation: Peter at once obeyed. Happy are they who, amidst affliction and trials, amidst tears, sorrows, and disappointments, amidst fruitless efforts and many failures in a dark and dreary path, are yet able to say, "Nevertheless at thy word we will wait in hope, or will go forward in active service." And when did ever obedience come short of its reward? He that does the Lord's will is sure to receive the Lord's blessing.

Peter let down the net, and the result was the enclosure of such a number of fishes that the net broke. Both the ships were freighted and filled with the spoil. Thus the unrewarded toil of the midnight hours was more than recompensed. The blessing of this extraordinary draught of fishes, after a night of bootless labour, was regarded by the fishermen as the result of the presence of Jesus and the effect of his power. It was to them at once a miracle and a gracious sign. And immediately we hear an humble exclamation from the lips of Peter. "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." In this miracle Christ appeared to these fishermen as the ruler of creation; as One who was able by the power of his will to direct the irrational creatures according to his own purpose or determination. The

feeling of the presence of a special Divine power dwelling in Jesus and emanating from him laid hold on Peter, producing astonishment, homage, and fear. His sense of awe expressed itself in his excitable temperament both by word and action. His imperfection and sinfulness appeared before him in such contrast with the heavenly power that was manifested in Christ, that he fell down in token of worship, and at the same time prayed the Master, now his "Lord," to depart from him. He felt himself in contact with the Infinite, and was afraid. It produced a profound and abasing consciousness of his own worthlessness; and, perhaps under the idea that whoever beholds God must die,* scarcely meaning what he said or knowing the full force of his words, he prayed Jesus of Nazareth to depart and leave him. But the Saviour at once gave him the gracious assurance, "Fear not." How much was there in such language from the lips of Jesus! The words were spoken to remove the fisherman's fears and soothe his misgivings. The whisper of this voice, the utterance of this word, was surely enough to restore confidence to his soul. And how often since then has Jesus said, "Fear not," to his disciples in times of anxiety, perplexity, and sorrow. "It is I; be not afraid." Reader, are you burdened with a sense of sin? Fear not. Christ can take it all away. Are you struggling with temptation? Fear not. Jesus your Lord is able and willing to defend you. Though heart and flesh should faint, yet God in Christ may be the strength of your heart and your portion for ever. What had Peter to fear, although he was a sinful man? Was not Jesus by him as his

* Judges vi. 23; xiii. 22.

Friend and Lord, the Saviour of sinners? With him he had no room, no right to fear.

Nor was this all. In addition to his word of encouragement, our Lord gave him a Divine commission. "From henceforth thou shalt catch men." This was the appointment to the apostleship. "Jesus made the mute tenants of the lake, that lay in dead and dying heaps in the net, a living parable," and pledge of far grander and loftier successes. Peter, in a sense, was to retain his net; but the souls of men were to be the nobler prey. He was to buffet waves still; but they were henceforth to be the waves of human passion, ignorance, and sin. The word "catch" has in the original a force peculiar to itself, meaning, to catch or take alive; to catch, not in order to kill or destroy, but to preserve, perpetuate, or elevate life. The Lord clothed his call and promise in the language of that art which was most familiar to Peter. His place and duty henceforth were to be in connexion with the Messiah's kingdom, the church of the living God; for he was to be a fisher of men.

Simon may at first, perhaps, have been startled by this promise, and what it involved; but he and his fellows seemed to comprehend its meaning. He was to be raised from the lower element to the higher, from the earthly to the heavenly. And ever since then the faithful preaching of the gospel has been like the casting of the net into the sea of human life; and myriads on myriads of souls have from age to age been the fruit of faithful toil. Amidst many discouragements, the servants of Christ, who are the fishers of men, after toiling long without catching anything, are yet ready to say, "Nevertheless at

thy word we will let down the net;" for so the Saviour commands.

Thus Peter obeyed; and we are then told of his noble resolution: "When they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him." It was not much, some might say, that they had to forsake—only a few fishing boats and nets: but it was their all. And if we would learn a lesson of surrender to the call of the Master, and of self-denial for his sake, we may go to these Galilean fishermen. They gave up their earthly pursuits, and adopted the spiritual calling which Jesus had pointed out to them. They resolved to follow him. The scenes of their youth and of their riper years were all around them; every rock and ravine, every creek and bay, was known to them; and at a moment's notice their worldly all was to be left—their home, their property, to be forsaken—and for what? To follow Christ, and cast in their lot with him. They did not yet, indeed, know all that this might involve; but they were assured that with Jesus there would be certain reward. The power of the higher life in Christ had laid hold of them, had freed them from their earthly ties, and enchained them by invisible bonds to him as their Lord and Master. Henceforth, for better, for worse, Peter attached himself to the person and fortunes, if we may use the word, of the Nazarene. Did he repent his choice? Was he a sufferer by his self-sacrificing devotion? Does he regret it now, that he surrendered all for Christ? No: the bond that held together Peter and Jesus, then formed, is now his undying felicity and glory. No surrender to him,

no sacrifice for him, can, either here or hereafter, be a matter of regret. Thus Peter became first a disciple, and then an apostle of the Lord.

This first portion of our narrative teaches several lessons. We may name a few.

1. The lowliest worldly occupation is perfectly compatible with the loftiest discipleship. There is nothing incongruous between humble toil and full consecration to God.

2. A gradual preparation is often provided by God for those whom he calls to his public service. Peter at Bethabara, and then at Tiberias, was under training. He had weeks, probably months, to meditate upon the interview which he had first enjoyed with Christ, and to prepare for the second.

3. Christ's service demands, and is worthy of, the entire surrender of all that we are and have, for him. Follow him at once and fully, and glory will be sure. Hold back no part of your being, no part of your possessions. He claims all; he deserves all; and he alone can bless and glorify all.



CHAPTER II.

PETER'S WALK UPON THE WATERS.

Peter's home at Capernaum—His wife not forsaken—The Romish doctrine of celibacy—The sickness of Peter's mother-in-law, and the miraculous cure—Effect of this miracle on Peter—The feeding of the five thousand—The disciples sent away alone—The storm—Jesus on the water—The fright of the disciples—Christ's assuring word—Peter's request—His failing faith—The rescue—The rebuke—Lessons.

“And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.”—*Matt.* xiv. 22—33.

“And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land. And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them. But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out: for they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid. And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered.”—*Mark* vi. 47—51.

“When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone. And when even was now come, his disciples went down unto the sea, and entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them. And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid. But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid. Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.”—*John* vi. 15—21.

PETER'S WALK UPON THE WATERS.

WE have considered the circumstances of Peter's call and consecration. We have seen him introduced to Christ, and receive his new name. Henceforth Jesus is to be his Lord and Master, securing the attachment and devotion of his whole heart and soul. Peter could not do anything by halves, and in surrendering to Christ he gave himself up to his influence and authority. "He forsook all, and followed him."

And yet, although we are thus told that he, with the others whom Jesus called at the same time, forsook all and followed him, we find that Peter had a home and a wife, if not also a family, at Capernaum.* This fact creates a difficulty in some minds as to how, in such a case, he could be said to have forsaken all. He gave up his ship or boat, his nets, and the craft by which he earned his bread. The renunciation was complete in will and purpose, and ready in act to be carried out in all its details, as necessity arose. And it is to be remembered, that though Christ will have our supreme affection, he never urges his claim upon our homage and love, by asking us to outrage the ties of nature, or to

* Matt. viii. 14—17.

do violence to the lawful affections of the heart which he himself has made. Peter, in giving himself to Jesus, was not required to separate from his wife; and he might still maintain a home for her. Accordingly we find that, subsequently, in some of his missionary travels he was accompanied by his wife.*

The very fact that he had a wife is important in its bearing on the celibacy which the Papacy requires in all its clergy. One of the marked features of the Romish apostasy is, that it forbids its priests to marry; yet the very man whom Rome exalts to a supremacy above all the apostles, was a husband and the head of a family. And when we know that he continued to sustain these relations after entering on his apostolic work, we see that he would have had no sympathy with the enforced and anti-christian celibacy of that church which falsely claims him as its founder.

Shortly after his call to the apostleship a circumstance occurred in his house at Capernaum which was well calculated to strengthen his faith in Jesus, and to increase his affection towards him. His mother-in-law had been seized with a violent fever; and the Saviour, coming into Peter's house from the synagogue, where he had performed a miracle on a demoniac, found her in this condition. He was told of the sickness, and was besought to heal her. At once, in the exercise of his own Divine benevolence and omnipotent power, "he rebuked the fever," so that it left her, and she arose. But it did not leave her in a state of weakness and exhaustion, as fevers generally do; it did not leave

* 1 Cor. ix. 5.

her gradually convalescent, but in perfect health and strength. The full vigour of health instantaneously returned; and so complete and extraordinary was her cure, that "she arose, and ministered unto them." May it not be said that in her conduct there is a pattern to all who are restored from sickness to health, that they should use the restored strength in ministering to Christ? This is the expression of true gratitude to Him who alone can keep us or make us well. Such a miracle, done in Peter's house, and on a member of his family, could not fail to make a deep impression on his mind, and to strengthen and multiply those ties which already bound his soul to Jesus as the Christ, his Saviour and his Lord. Its influence would thus be sacred and enduring, opening up, as it did, more of the mercifulness and the majesty of Christ to the love and homage of the grateful disciple.

Several months probably intervened between this circumstance and the scene that is now to pass under our review. On the eastern shore of the Sea of Tiberias, on an elevated plain—called a desert because uncultivated by the hands of men, though abounding in verdant grass—our Lord had performed the signal miracle of feeding five thousand men, besides women and children, from five barley loaves and two small fishes. Thus he showed how abundantly he could provide for the necessities of humanity, and symbolically proclaimed and proved himself to be the Bread of Life for perishing men. When the wants of the people were satisfied, and the shades of evening began to descend, we are told that our Lord dismissed the multitude, and "con-

strained his disciples to get into a ship, and return to the other side of the lake," towards Capernaum and Bethsaida. But why did he constrain them? Why did they need to be constrained? It seems to be implied that the disciples were unwilling to go on the lake without their Master. They did not like to be separated from him. On a former occasion, when about to cross that sea, he had said, "Let us go over unto the other side of the lake;" and he went into the ship, and they followed him.* But now he dismissed the disciples by themselves; and he had to constrain them before they would go without him. This could scarcely be from the mere fear of a storm which they might see to be impending, or because darkness was coming on; for they had been on that lake in all weathers and at all hours: but they were unwilling to go without him; they wished not to leave their Master behind. Our Lord, doubtless, meant to teach them, that they were not always to be dependent on his bodily presence, and that they were not to suppose that he was with them only when they could see him. So he sent them away by themselves, while "he went up into a mountain apart to pray."

It was the evening twilight when the disciples went on board their little vessel, and the darkness of night was coming fast upon them. Shortly after they had embarked the wind arose, and the little inland sea began to roll and rage with tempest swell, so that the ship was tossed upon the waves. With a contrary or head wind sails were of little or no avail, and the disciples had to put forth their strength in rowing.

* Luke viii. 22; Matt. viii. 23.

Hour after hour passed away, and they made but little progress. Midnight came, and they were still scarcely more than half way across the lake; and after they had toiled manfully at the oars for nearly nine hours, the fourth watch (from three o'clock in the morning to daybreak) found them still pitching on the billows of that raging sea. What would be the feelings of the disciples on such a night, and especially in the thought that they had left Jesus behind them? Would they not be disposed to say, "Oh, if the Master had been with us, then this storm might not have arisen; then we should have been in no danger; then he would have hushed this tempest as he did the former one! Would to God that he had been with us! What is become of him?"

But Christ did not forget them. When on the mountain-top alone, in communion with his Father, amidst the darkness of the night, he saw them, knew all their circumstances, and was ready to help them. When they were tried to the uttermost, when they were in the very extremity of danger, and when they breathed their deepest sigh in the ardent wish that the Master had been with them, he appeared for their rescue and safety.

In the very height of the storm a form appeared walking in quiet majesty upon the raging waters. What could it be? The appearance was so startling and so awful, that it drew the attention of the disciples away, for the time, from the storm and their own danger. They concluded it must be an apparition or a spirit, and were terrified; they even cried out for fear. The storm of the elements around them, in which they were buffeted and tossed,

seemed as nothing compared with this new source of terror. Nor can we be surprised at their consternation, as they saw over the summit of the restless and raging waves, approaching in the obscurity of night, an indistinct and shadowy form.

But that form was their safety and their joy, the very presence for which they longed, though they knew it not. Thus Heaven's best blessings are oftentimes mistaken even by God's own people. They come in some unusual form, or through some unwonted channel; they come in the shape of an affliction or a bereavement; and at first they are not recognised. Their very approach may terrify, and the soul cries out in fear. Yet many a man has been brought to true life through being brought near to the gates of death; many a parent has had to bless God for the loss of a child; the tear of sorrow in many a case becomes as a dew-drop of blessing sparkling in the light of heaven, with the beauties and glories of the invisible.

“Let us be patient! These severe afflictions
Not from the ground arise;
But oftentimes celestial benedictions
Assume this dark disguise.

“We see but dimly through the mists and vapours:
Amid these earthly damps,
What seem to us but sad funereal tapers
May be heaven's distant lamps.”

Thus the disciples mistook their Lord for some terrible phantom; nor were they quieted and reassured until they heard in his well-known voice the words, “Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.” How these words would thrill their souls! “It is I.” They needed no other assurance to

throw to the winds their fears, and to hush to rest their minds disturbed by the storm. The Master was with them, near them; and that was enough. And yet one of the evangelists tells that he "would have passed by them."* But even this seeming delay, this apparent indifference at first, would only lead them to appreciate his presence the more, and would call forth more fully their faith and prayer. Hence their joy in deliverance and in him would be purer and more intense. So he delayed going to Bethany, after he had heard that Lazarus was ill.† So, also, after walking with the two disciples to Emmaus, when he reached their home in the village "he made as though he would have gone further," in order to draw from them the entreaty that he would abide with them.‡

Look, then, at the three elements in this picture, this "sea-view" in the sacred narrative: we have the raging and tempestuous sea, tossing the frail bark of the Galilean fishermen; we have the affrighted disciples, in an agony of fear; we have the Saviour and Friend of sinners, walking in silent majesty upon the storm, coming to bless and save his followers; the Lord of their troubled hearts as he was Lord of the raging waves. And he is still the same in gracious sympathy and almighty power. With these few words, "It is I; be not afraid," he has calmed the storm-tossed heart in every age. Amidst the buffetings of the world, and the conflicts of the inner life, how mighty is the assuaging and soothing power of his voice, his presence, and his word. These give peace when all around seems

* Mark vi. 48.

† John xi. 6.

‡ Luke xxiv. 28, 29.

desolation. The echo of his voice, coming through the lapse of ages, has rebuked many a doubt, and put to flight many a fear, and been the means of defying and defeating many a spiritual foe. In the deepest trial what more do we need to cheer and sustain us than to hear the Saviour say, with his own Divine sympathy and tenderness, "It is I; be not afraid"? The presence of Jesus is, to the Christian, strength and safety in every scene of sorrow and in every time of danger.

These words of Jesus, on the occasion of this storm on Gennesaret, bring distinctly again before us the apostle whose history, in these chapters, we especially wish to trace and study. Look at the man. Interest begins already to gather around him, and to increase as we advance. He is there, on board that storm-tossed boat, with the other disciples; but he is the first to speak. There is a manliness, an energy, an active forwardness about him peculiar to himself. He has not the quiet contemplativeness, nor the receptive calmness of John; but he has an impetuosity and force by which he is easily distinguished. He was bold, hasty, and ardent, with a soul full of deep emotion, and ever liable to sudden impulse. He was ready for any emergency, and at once prepared to pledge himself to any duty, or to any difficulty, and yet, perhaps on this very account, he was as much disposed to shrink at the sudden appearance of danger. If John was specially beloved by Jesus, we cannot help thinking that Jesus was specially beloved by Peter; loved with an ardour and fondness peculiarly his own. Now the Saviour had rebuked the fears and

hushed the anxieties of the disciples by the words, "It is I; be not afraid;" but Peter, ever prompt and impulsive, comes out at once with a characteristic utterance: "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." Why does he make such a request as this? Was it necessary? Was it proper? We may briefly analyze it.

The request is the utterance of excited affection. "Lord, if it be thou." Did he, then, doubt his Master's voice or his Master's words? I think not. He addresses him as "Lord" before he says, "if it be thou." Doubt in such a case might have been in keeping with the character of Thomas, but certainly not with the character of Peter. This was, however, no mere hypothetical expression on his part. The words really mean, "Lord, since it is thou, bid me come to thee." It was because Jesus was there that he wished to come. Peter was hardly the man to put such a test to the identity of his Master; but when he knew that it was his Master who was on the water, and had spoken, he was just the man impetuously and without consideration to wish to be near him. He was so impulsive and ardent, so excited and aroused, that he could not patiently wait for Christ's coming into the ship. It was natural and beautiful, indeed, to desire to be where his Lord was; but the affectionate impulse in this case was not altogether discreet. In truth, his request shows a thoughtless presumption. "Bid me come unto thee," he says to Jesus: but why? What need was there for this walk upon the waters? Perhaps he wished to show his boldness, and to compensate for the cry of terror in which he had united with

the other disciples when they first saw the awful form upon the sea. Yet it was presumption. He knew well that of himself, and in his own power, he could not walk upon the stormy billows. Why, then, did he call for such a test or proof of miraculous power on his behalf? It was wholly unnecessary to do so. The Lord was coming to the ship. With him on board they would have all that their souls could desire, of peace, love, and safety; and there was no need for Peter to call for a miracle, that he might get to his Master upon the water.

This request seems also to express something of self-seeking: "Bid me come unto thee." Here, perhaps, was the real evil, the secret flaw in his faith and devotedness. He was not yet entirely freed from selfishness, and he was now to learn a lesson by experience, that faith and love, to be truly influential and blessed, must be divested of every element of ostentation and vain-glory. How was the request received? What response did it bring forth?

Mark the Saviour's reply. Jesus said, "Come;" simply, "Come," without a word of encouragement or positive command. He did not say, "Yes; I bid thee come unto me," but merely granted him permission to do so. He neither forbade nor encouraged him, but uttered one word, which was as if he had said, "If you like you may come." Peter did not yet know himself; and there was wisdom as well as love in our Lord's reply. He meant to teach his ardent apostle such a lesson as he would never forget; a lesson, too, which it would be well for him to learn. He much needed it; and if it thus came in the way of his own seeking, it might be all the more im-

pressive. So our Lord simply said, "Come," without another word giving either pledge of safety or warrant of success.

We see the result in the scene that followed. No sooner had our Lord said, "Come," than Peter did come. He was all fearlessness and energy, and rushed down the vessel's side—no easy matter in such a rough, tempestuous sea—and his feet were speedily upon the waters. They bore him up, and for a moment he marched manfully towards his Master. His faith seemed strong, and he walked in safety upon the watery pathway. For a short time all was well. But see! he soon begins to sink, and as he advances he sinks deeper still: with every new step he is further immersed in the waves. They come between him and Jesus. They rage, and roll, and roar around him. He sees them, and them only. He forgets that Christ is near, and perceives only that he is surrounded by tempestuous billows. But he did not seem to notice the wind or see the waves before; why, then, now? No new storm had arisen. Its force had not even increased. Before he left the ship the wind had been as boisterous and the billows as stormy as now. He did not fear them then: why does he fear them now? Did his wandering eyes bring him into this danger? He had taken them off from Christ, so that he saw only the storm; and as he began to take counsel with flesh and blood, he trembled at his own rashness, and forthwith felt that he was sinking. His confidence was crushed, and his soul was filled with terror. What would become of him? Could he not cry to his fellow disciples to throw him a rope from

the ship? Might he not, in his extreme peril, swim, as we know he could well do? * No; not one of these expedients was of avail. He had thrown himself on grace, and he will not trust to nature. This is he who had thought to show openly his greater courage before the other disciples; and as he sinks, and is beginning to be submerged, the consciousness of his presumption bursts upon him, and he cries, "Lord, save me." He knew where to go: he will honour Christ once more by trusting him; and if he sink he will sink looking unto Jesus. So let us remember that in the sea of human trouble, when we are buffeted with the storms of life, it is Jesus only that can save us.

Behold now the deliverance. "Immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him." Precious Saviour! when did ever any one in distress or danger call to him in vain? The deliverance of Peter was speedy and complete. "Immediately" he put forth his hand for the rescue. Jesus might have upbraided him with his rashness, might have justly left him for a little to feel the consequences of his own presumption. But no; the Saviour did not upbraid a perishing, praying man. He put forth his hand at once to save him. He did not say, "Have courage: there is no danger; I am near;" but mercifully condescended at the moment to lay hold of him. There was much in this: the deliverance was palpable, human, brotherly, and yet pre-eminently Divine. It was considerate, gracious, and tender. That sustaining hand restored confidence to the fearful disciple, and made him feel that with such help he could safely

* John xxi. 7.

tread the waves of the raging sea. Thus we see a sinking disciple meet with a ready Saviour. It is so always when the disciple cries to his Lord. For eighteen centuries the Lord's hand has never been shortened that it could not save. How many times has it been stretched out since it rescued Peter! In seasons of difficulty, temptation, and danger, that hand has often been put forth to save the sinking disciple. When God's people, amidst the storms of time in the voyage of life, are tossed upon the waves, when the sky is black and lowering, the winds boisterous, and the billows of trouble roll thickly, and they begin to fear, and, as it were, to sink, the outstretched hand of a living Saviour often—though, perhaps, to them unconsciously—has been their deliverance and salvation. No shipwrecked, sinking mariner was ever in greater peril than is the soul of the impenitent and unregenerate man. He is without a compass or a pilot on the stormy sea of life. There is but one hand can snatch the soul from this jeopardy. That hand is ever outstretched and ready to save, and the ear of Jesus is ever open to hear.

But Peter did not pass without rebuke: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" It was very gentle, as the rebukes of Jesus generally were when he spoke to his own disciples; for he sought to teach them as they were able to bear. Weigh the language in which he now addressed Peter: "O thou of little faith." He did not denounce him as an unbeliever, or speak of him as showing no faith. Jesus recognised the presence of faith in him, but wisely and graciously rebuked him for its weakness. It was faith mixed with other lower principles that led

him to venture on the waves, and it was faith that forced from him the cry, "Lord, save me." The Saviour does not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. He rebuked Peter on this occasion for the feebleness of his faith, and asked him, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" He did not say, "Wherefore didst thou leave the ship?" or, "Wherefore didst thou come?" lest he should check the ardour and damp the energy of a loving and earnest man. He would do nothing which might hinder the future impulses of the disciple's generous boldness, but rather wished to guide those impulses aright. Peter's fault lay, not in having undertaken too much after the Lord gave him permission, but in having too little confidence in the presence and power of that Master to whom he was walking. "Why didst thou doubt? Why forget that I was there, the Lord of the winds and the waves? Before the doubt arose in thy heart thou didst safely walk upon the waves, and now thou art walking safely again: wherefore, then, didst thou doubt?"

Peter was silent. He attempted no reply to his Lord's rebuke, and made no excuse for his conduct. He felt that he had been both rash and wrong, and he returned to the vessel a wiser, and, doubtless, also a humbler man. The Saviour's hand still held him; and walking thus, under the care and keeping of Jesus, he was perfectly safe. What a position for a weak and sinking disciple, to be walking on the waves in company with Christ! Blessed are they, and safe in all the storms of life, who advance under the care and in the keeping of the Son of God. Peter's courage soon came back again; and no wonder. He would never forget that night as long as he lived;

and its influence would tend to entwine his affections more ardently and fondly than before around the Saviour.

When they were on board the ship the tempest ceased, and they immediately, and without doubt miraculously, reached their desired haven.

"With Christ in the vessel
They smile at the storm."

And may not Peter in this narrative be regarded as a kind of representative man? Is he not an image of God's people in all ages, in respect of the difficulties in which they involve themselves, of the doubts which rise around them, and of the storms which they have to encounter? And does not his deliverance show the only help which can meet their case, and which is available for them? Some lessons for ourselves we may gather from the interesting facts of this portion of Peter's life.

Presumption is a constant cause of difficulty. Thoughtlessness and impetuosity, even when well meant, will frequently hurry even the believer into trouble, and surround him with circumstances from which he may not be able to extricate himself. It was not necessary for Peter to attempt to walk upon the sea in order to show his ardent attachment to Christ. It is not necessary for us to promise or to attempt what is not within our reach or our powers in order to prove our zeal for him or his cause. We have need to beware of foolish and thoughtless acts in the Christian life, as well as in the ordinary pursuits of business. And if in our presumption there is selfishness, evil is sure to come of it, and we may be taught wisdom by a painful experience.

The doubting disciple will be apt to sink in the stormy scenes of life. There are such scenes in the soul's experience, when the sky is black, and the clouds lour, and the sun is hid, and the billows roll mountains high. Then faith wavers and fears arise. Doubt sees nothing but the waves, and the storm, and the danger; and the soul begins to sink as it gives way to unbelief. Where is the remedy? Look not at the storm, but to Him who permits it and who rules it, and the noisy billows will be only as waves bearing you onward to the haven and home of rest. Doubt dishonours Christ, and meets with his gracious admonition and faithful rebuke. Why should any of his disciples thus displease and dishonour him?

The believing disciple will safely breast the storms of life. While Peter believed, he walked firmly upon the watery way. And so still, to him that believeth all things are possible. Let there be dependence on Christ, confidence in his love, wisdom, and faithfulness, and every difficulty will be overcome, every foe mastered. Keep the eye of faith on the Saviour, and no storm need terrify you, for no tempest can endanger your safety. During a hurricane which was raging round the ship on board of which Cæsar sailed, he cheered the anxious mariners by saying, "*Fear nothing: you carry Cæsar.*" The presence of Christ is safety to the soul in any storm. A greater than Cæsar is here.

The praying disciple will find help ever near him. The storm may arise, the raging tempest may seem ready to destroy him; but prayer will bring the Saviour to his side to take him by the hand. What Christian does not know the power of prayer? Yet

what Christian knows it as he might? Reader, art thou tossed with trouble? art thou in danger? Cry in conscious helplessness; cry in childlike faith; cry, and Jesus will be at thy side to help and save thee. Your soul will be cheered and strengthened by the voice which you ought to know: "Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid."



CHAPTER III.

PETER'S CONFESSION OF JESUS.

I. Christ at Capernaum—The synagogue—Spiritual doctrine—Many offended, and leave Jesus—His question to the twelve—Its character—Peter's reply—Its fulness and force.—II. Jesus in Galilee—His intercourse with the disciples—The question as to the opinion of others—"Whom say ye that I am?"—A personal question—Latitudinarianism rebuked by it—The reply by Peter again—The assured belief—His view of Christ—Corroboration from Peter's Epistles—The Lord's approval of the reply—The promise to Peter—**Its meaning.**

“Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”—*John* vi. 67—69.

“When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”—*Matt.* xvi. 13—19.

“And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Cæsarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am? And they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets. And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ. And he charged them that they should tell no man of him.”—*Mark* viii. 27—30.

“And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am? They answering said, John the Baptist; but some say, Elias; and others say, that one of the old prophets is risen again. He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God.”—*Luke* ix. 18—20.

PETER'S CONFESSION OF JESUS.

NO sooner had our Lord, bringing Peter with him, come on board the ship in which the other disciples were, than they found themselves at the land. The remaining part of the voyage seems to have been quickly and miraculously performed. The wind at once ceased, the storm was hushed, and the shore was almost instantaneously reached.

Morning twilight had passed away, and the first beams of the rising sun were thrown upon the waters of Gennesaret, when the people, who had been dispersed after their miraculous repast on the previous afternoon, began to seek Jesus. But they sought him in vain. Whither could he have gone? was their anxious inquiry. As they were not able to find him, and as they knew there had been no other boat on the eastern side besides that in which the disciples embarked, they concluded that he must have gone round the head of the lake by land to the western shore.* Hence they supposed that if they could cross the water they should reach the opposite side before him, and thus probably meet him on his arrival. Accordingly, as soon as boats had come over from the towns on the other side, many of the more eager and ardent among them took passage across. It never

* John vi. 22—24.

entered their minds that Jesus, who had fed them by miracle, could, by the same Divine power which was in him, walk upon the waters. On arriving at Capernaum they heard with surprise that Jesus was already come, and had gone to the synagogue.* Thither they forthwith followed him, and began to question him concerning his arrival. They were puzzled how he could have got there before them; but he did not satisfy their curiosity, nor did he tell them of the miracle by which he had manifested his glory on the tempestuous sea. He began at once to lay bare the real character of the impulse by which they had been led to seek him. "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." And, alas! how many times since then has the principle of "the loaves and fishes" entered into the avowal of attachment to the cause and kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. It behoves every one to watch against and to resist the intrusion of such a selfish motive as this into his religious profession.

Our Lord, taking, so to speak, a text from what had happened, proceeded to show the multitude in the synagogue that the nourishment which he had to offer was not earthly and perishable; that it was not nourishment for the body which he had come to give, but sustenance for the soul. He declared that he was the "bread which came down from heaven;" that he gave his flesh "for the life of the world." This was indeed a spiritual and a mysterious theme; and although the Saviour's hearers could not fully understand it, they comprehended enough to see that it aimed a destructive blow at the ambitious views and

* John vi. 26—59.

worldly hopes of their nation. They had followed Christ from carnal and sordid motives, and now his discourse was too spiritual for their thoughts and feelings. It offended their national pride and arrogance. Never, perhaps, was any discourse delivered by Jesus more marked or manifest in its effects. "Many of" those who had professed to be "his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." They withdrew from attendance on his teaching. They no longer followed him from place to place. They returned to their ordinary avocations, satisfied that he was not the Messiah whom they expected or wished for. They were disappointed, and their motives and characters stood at once disclosed.

I. This desertion was so decided and so general, that he, who a few hours before might have been carried as King amid the hosannas and acclamations of thousands, was now left almost, if not altogether, alone with his twelve apostles. Hence arose the question which brings Peter again prominently before us. The Saviour turned to the twelve, and asked, "Will ye also go away?"

Truly this was a touching appeal. How much is there in the question of Jesus to show us, that while he was Divine, he was also really human. He cherished the joys of human friendship, and felt the need of human sympathy. He who abode so often in affectionate endearment with the family of Bethany; he who so sacredly and sinlessly fostered the social ties of the human heart; he who made man's heart what it is, and who had in his own bosom the heart of a true man—could not see these crowds leaving him without an emotion of sadness on his own

account, as well as on theirs ; and with touching tenderness he turned to his chosen twelve, whom he had gathered more closely around him, and asked them, "Will ye also go away?" "Will ye follow yonder multitude, that so recently shouted their admiration of me? May I still depend on your friendship and on your affection?" In the circumstances of the case the question was inexpressibly affecting. It might well sink into the hearts of the disciples, for it came from the inmost heart of their Master. It was a testing question, too, and distinctly called for some reply. On that reply would probably depend their future course and destiny, in relation to Him whom they had learned to call their Saviour and Lord.

What was the response? "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." It was Peter that spoke, the forward, impulsive, and ardent Peter. This noble reply is in his words. He took upon himself to speak in his own name, and for his fellow-apostles ; none so ready, so prompt, so energetic as he. It was a true-hearted declaration, and none the less impressive or attractive that it was impassioned. It deserves earnest consideration.

The desertion of Christ is deprecated and dreaded by Peter. The very idea was painful to him : "Lord, to whom shall we go?" We have no other Friend, no other Master, no other Divine Companion, no other Messiah, but thee. To whom, then, can we go? They had already left all to follow him ; and could they now go back? What would even Judaism be to them now, without him? What would the prospects of their

nation be to them, without him? What would the world itself be to them, without him? They had nowhere else to go, and for better, for worse, they were prepared to abide with him. So Peter, for himself and the rest, earnestly and ardently exclaimed, "Lord, to whom shall we go?"

And he assigns the reason: "Thou hast the words of eternal life." Jesus had very shortly before said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."* Now Peter declares they had felt the truth of the Lord's statement. From the first words that he had heard Jesus utter, when he gave him his new name, up to that moment, he had himself felt all his communications and discourses to be elevating and quickening. His instructions had given the disciples new thoughts, inspired them with new hopes, and made their hearts throb with new affections and longings. Their intercourse with Jesus had been so impressive, powerful, and blessed on themselves, that they could not leave him. They felt in their hearts, and knew from their spiritual history, that he had the words of eternal life; and what more could they need? What more could they desire? Moreover, through this experience Peter was able still further to say, "We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." This was a glorious assurance and a most precious conviction. "We believe and know," said Peter—"know for certain: our conviction is solid and sure." Thus their faith in Jesus became to them the basis and means of the highest knowledge. They trusted in him, and their trust blossomed into a spiritual consciousness and a joyous assurance.

* John vi. 63.

So it does still. A certain knowledge of facts of course is required as the ground of faith, for "faith cometh by hearing;" but when faith is devoutly and humbly exercised, it will lead to an inward spiritual knowledge which nothing can gain-say. Hence, "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself."* In this way Peter, although he and his fellow apostles did not yet fully comprehend all that was contained in the great truth which he declared, had reached the sure conviction that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Whatever others might think of him, they had long felt in their inmost hearts what he was. It was to them a matter of clear, undoubted consciousness, that their Master was the Christ, the promised Messiah, and the Son of the Highest. Through a preparatory belief and a devout perception of his words they had attained to the height of this Divine knowledge.

How glorious, then, was this conviction, how wonderful this assurance, for these Galilean fishermen. Now all that had been predicted would be fulfilled, all that had been promised come to pass. Nor is this assurance less important or less blessed now, to every man who reaches it. It is life and salvation, the true resting place of human desire and hope.

On this occasion our Lord appears not to have been willing to enter into the question of his Messiahship; for he simply remarked, that notwithstanding this declaration, made in behalf of all the disciples, there was one among them, a traitor to the truth and to the assurance thus expressed. The

* I. John v. 10.

views of the apostles regarding Christ's kingdom were still very defective; and he taught them as they were able to bear. Another opportunity shortly occurred of enlightening them further on the same great and important theme.

II. We have now to turn to another period in our Lord's earthly history, recorded in St. Matthew xvi. 13—20; Mark viii. 27; Luke ix. 18. Jesus, probably seeking temporary retirement and retreat, had travelled northward beyond the boundaries of Herod's jurisdiction. His time was not yet fully come; and as he could no longer walk in Jewry, for fear of the Jews,* he proceeded into Galilee, and even went further north than we read of his having been either before or after that time. He came into the region of Cæsarea Philippi. This city, which was on the road to Damascus, lay a little to the east of the main source of the river Jordan, in a part of the country very picturesque, richly wooded, and abounding in natural beauties; thus affording a place of retirement well fitted to impress and soothe the mind.

Our Lord, as usual, took his disciples with him. Gradually, by this hallowed intercourse and fellowship, he was drawing them more closely to himself, and the light was shining more strongly and clearly upon their minds. The vision arose in their thoughts of a glorious Divine presence sojourning with them, and they anticipated that yet it would burst forth in a blaze of celestial splendour. Here, withdrawn for a short time from the gaze of the multitude and the excitement of Judea, and beneath the snowy heights of Hermon, an interview took place between our Lord and his disciples which will be ever memorable

* John vii. 1.

in the history of the world. It referred to his personal glory and Messiahship. Luke tells us* that he had been praying with his disciples, to prepare their minds for what was about to follow, leading their thoughts above the natural and the earthly, to the Divine and heavenly. The Saviour now put to them another momentous question, and there was another noble reply. For the direct question to the disciples, "Whom say ye that I am?" Jesus made some preparation by first asking, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" As if he had said, "What now at last do the people think or say of me, after all that I have hitherto done and taught? What is the prevailing public opinion about me?" Why was Christ anxious about this? Simply, so far as we can see, because all that he did and taught was with a view to manifest who he was and whence he came, and thus to awaken and establish faith in his person. The replies given by the disciples show the various opinions entertained regarding Jesus. According to their statement, some merely saw in him John the Baptist risen from the dead; while others looked upon him as Elias. There was still another party, who held him to be Jeremiah, or some one of the old prophets. All these opinions went to the regarding of Jesus merely as a remarkable person, and placed him only in probable or close connexion with the Messiah. But none of them showed the conviction that he was the Messiah; doubtless because his whole ministry seemed more or less to stand in contradiction to the general Messianic expectations of his countrymen.

But Jesus, passing from these varied and conflicting

* Luke ix. 18.

opinions respecting himself, asked his apostles directly, "Whom say ye that I am?"

The question, therefore, was a personal one. It was not sufficient for them to know the views of others about the Son of man: they must have right views of him for themselves. Nor is acquaintance with the opinions of others sufficient now. It is not enough for us to know what they think or believe: we must ourselves think and believe aright about Christ. It will avail us nothing to be able to reckon up opinions about him, if we have not a sure, just, and influential conviction in our own minds: and we do well to remember that Christ asks now, as of old, "Whom say ye that I am?" The question was manifestly a fair one. The disciples had now been a considerable time with Jesus; they had seen and heard him under all circumstances; they had enjoyed abundant opportunity of reaching a clear conviction and assurance: so that the question was one which they might well answer, even although they did not fully grasp or comprehend all the truth which their own reply might involve. So we, in our land and age, with our many privileges, have abundant means of reaching the truth about the Son of God; and it may justly be asked also of us, "What think ye of Christ?" The question, moreover, was a deeply important one. In the circumstances of the disciples none could be more so. The main object of Christ in his miracles and teaching was so to manifest himself as the Son of God, that men might trust in him. Hence the hopes and joys, the future triumphs and coming duties of the disciples, depended upon him, and upon their reception of him in all that he professed to be.

Those who looked upon him merely as John the Baptist, or Elijah, could not be rightly influenced by him. Hence his great anxiety that men should have true and just views about himself; for surely it was of immense importance whether they believed him to be a mere human prophet or the Christ of God. How strikingly does this question of our Lord's rebuke the flippant and false latitudinarianism of those who think that it does not matter what particular views men may have about the person of Christ, provided only they seek to follow his counsel and obey his precepts. The true influence of Jesus is felt by those alone who believe and know him to be what he declares himself to be. Right thoughts about him are essential to true virtue from him. He is the Saviour only of those who worship him.

Mark, now, the reply to the question thus put by our Lord. Here Peter again comes before us, ever prompt, impetuous, and eager, as the mouth-piece of the other apostles. He answers quickly and gladly in the name of all. Assured that no one of his brethren would contradict the declaration, and that all believed it, he said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." He was not led astray by the conflicting opinions which had been quoted, but replied at once, unhesitatingly and fully, in terms very much the same as those of his former confession. The answer was very decided: "Thou art the Christ." Peter did not say, "We think thou art;" or, "We say thou art;" but, "Thou art." There was no hesitation, no doubt about it. It was not with them a matter of opinion, but of certainty. They knew it, and Peter declared the fact. This

reply, too, was full. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." These words expressed the whole of Christ's personal glory and Divine mission. They conveyed the truth of his Messiahship, which involved both his humanity and his Godhead. "Thou art the Christ," the Anointed of God, the Shiloh that was to come, the promised Deliverer. To the apostles all the symbols of Moses, and all the visions of the prophets, rested and centred in him. Every Jewish hope and every Jewish desire was directed towards the Messiah; and now, in Jesus, they beheld the crown of their hope and the end of their desire. But the Jewish idea generally regarding the Messiah was nothing more than that he would be a dignified and glorious man. These disciples had been taught much more than this. They had been in Christ's own school; they had seen his works and heard his words, and had learned a far deeper lesson, a lesson which Peter here enunciates: "Thou art the Son of the living God." Yes; Jesus was not only the Messiah, but the Son of God, the Son of Him who had called their father Abraham, who had appeared to Moses at the burning bush, who had proclaimed his majesty around the hoary peaks of Sinai, who once and again had come with ever living and gracious power to visit and to bless his people. He was the Son of the Highest, of the living God of Israel, the symbols of whose presence had been deposited with their nation until now. What must have been their thoughts and feelings when for the first time this truth flashed itself upon the minds of the apostles as a sublime and overpowering reality! They found at first in Jesus the Christ promised to Israel, and in the

Christ they found the Son of the living God ; a discovery surpassing in its momentousness and majesty even the discovery of his Messiahship. Hence was not this reply, as a creed, in a sense complete ? It was sufficient : Jesus asked no more. It is sufficient still ; for in Christ, as the Son of the living God, there is a resting place for the understanding, the conscience, and the heart of man, an asylum for every righteous desire and hope of the human soul.

Such, then, was Peter's opinion of Jesus, his Saviour and his Lord. And it is interesting for a moment in this connexion to refer to the terms in which in his after-life he speaks of Jesus, as we find them in his Epistles. He is the only apostle that uses the word *precious* when he speaks of things relating to Christ ; as if that word had been a favourite term of his. The blood which he shed upon the cross for our redemption is "precious blood ;" Christ himself as a living foundation is "precious ;" to all who "believe he is precious ;" the promises given unto us through him are "exceeding great and precious promises ;" and the faith by which we are united to him is "precious faith." * Blessed, truly, are they who believe, and find Christ thus precious to them ; for he is precious by all that can worthily enlist the affections, transform the nature, and elevate the soul.

But how did our Lord receive this confession of his apostle ? On the former occasion he made no remark upon it : now, however, he receives it with a marked emphasis of approbation, and gives a gracious commendation and a blessed promise. "Blessed art

* 1 Pet. i. 19 ; ii. 4 ; ii. 7 ; 2 Pet. i. 4 ; i. 1.

thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”* The Saviour did not shrink from accepting the whole truth of Peter’s confession, but claimed to be all that the apostle said. It was what he had taught respecting himself, and what he had manifested himself to be. And for this confession, and for the faith which it implied and from which it sprung, Peter was blessed, pronounced happy, a partaker of the blessedness which results from Divine teaching and Divine favour. This blessedness rested not only on the belief which gave forth this noble confession, but especially on the fact that the truth which it proclaimed was reached through a Divine enlightenment and revelation. “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” To be so privileged, to enjoy the drawing and illuminating power of the Father, to be made to see light which the soul naturally does not perceive, is a ground of blessedness and an element of happiness truly great and sacred. The natural heart can see no beauty in Jesus, why he should be desired; and whoever intelligently and devoutly says that he is “the Christ,” can do so only by the teaching of the Holy Ghost.† This declaration of blessedness would help Peter’s faith, quicken his piety, and solace his soul, after the faithlessness and failure which he had manifested amidst the tempestuous billows of the lake.

But there was a promise as well as a commendation in our Lord’s words: “I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against

* Matt. xvi. 17-19.

† 1 Cor. xii. 3.

it." As if he had said, "Thou hast told me what I am, and I will tell thee what thou art." It is very clear that Peter himself did not receive or understand the Romish interpretation of this promise; nor did his fellow apostles. He never, on the ground of this promise, arrogated to himself any supremacy or pre-eminence over his brethren. On the contrary, Peter boldly testifies in his Epistles against all the principal dogmas of the Papacy, which vainly claims to be enthroned in St. Peter's chair. Against lordship over the church he says, "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock;"* against the idea of a priesthood distinct from the Christian community, he says of all Christians, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood;"† and against all righteousness by our own works he says, "Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."‡

In the promise which Christ on this occasion made to him there is an historical fact predicted. On Peter was to devolve the duty and privilege of first preaching the gospel to the Jews, on the day of Pentecost,§ and then to the Gentiles, in the house of Cornelius the centurion.|| In this sense, and in this only, was Peter to be the instrumental foundation of the Christian church; its active and honoured beginner. He was thus Peter, the Rockman.

But there is also spiritual truth suggested in the promise. Jesus had first addressed his disciple as Simon: now, when he makes this promise to him,

* 1 Pet. v. 3.

† 1 Pet. ii. 5, 9.

‡ 1 Pet. iii. 18.

§ Acts ii.

|| Acts x.

he addresses him as Peter. It was not Simon, the natural man, but Peter, the new and the spiritual man, who was to be the honoured instrument of laying the foundation of the church as a spiritual building. That church is to be composed of spiritual men, and built up by spiritual means.*

In our Lord's words there is, further, an announcement of spiritual authority: "And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." How much and how awfully has this "power of the keys" been perverted! It had its meaning in the apostolic authority with which Peter was invested, and which was manifested in such judgments as those pronounced on Ananias and Sapphira,† and on Simon Magus.‡ The preaching of reconciliation and condemnation is the true doctrine now of the keys; and he that preaches it faithfully opens the kingdom to believers and shuts it against all unbelievers. No official supremacy can be claimed for Peter from our Lord's words; yet it is equally clear that he was promised some personal distinction in the exercise of an office common to the apostles. In this promise of the Lord there was food for solemn thought and lofty hope to Peter. How did it affect him? We shall see.

* For a full examination of the meaning of this controverted passage see Appendix A.

† Acts v. 3—9.

‡ Acts viii. 20, 21.

CHAPTER IV.

PETER'S FIRST THOUGHTS ON THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

Our Lord announces his suffering—The astonishment of the disciples—Peter's presumption—His words to Christ, betraying ignorance and prejudice, and yet sincere affection—His view of Christ's death—How changed afterwards—The Saviour's reply to Peter—Reproof, faithful, severe, solemn, humbling—Lessons for us from this narrative—The rashness of ignorance—The strength of prejudice—The subtlety of temptation.

“From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again on the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord : this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan : thou art an offence unto me : for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”—*Matt.* xvi. 21—23.

“And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan : for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.”—*Mark* viii. 31—33.

PETER'S FIRST THOUGHTS ON THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

IT was in the same region, and probably in continuation of the same conversation as that which we have just considered, that the circumstances occurred which now come under our review. Under the shadows of Hermon, and far away from the turmoil and excitement of Judea, our Lord gave utterance to truth which startled and even shocked his devoted followers. It was ever his desire to teach them as they "were able to bear it;" and from the noble confession of Peter, which had been twice made, from the bold and unhesitating declaration of his faith, a declaration made for the rest as well as for himself, might it not be justly concluded that they were now capable of receiving more truth, and able to bear the lesson that he was about to give them? Christ had already endeavoured, by his words and works, to teach them that he was the Messiah, the expected Deliverer, the Star of Jacob, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the promised Shiloh. The conviction of this truth was now strong upon their minds: they were sure that he was "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Hence our Lord advanced to teach them a new lesson: that the Messiah—their Messiah—must suffer and die. But for this doctrine they were not prepared; so that

our Lord's announcement of his death took them by surprise. "From that time," when he had obtained from themselves the assurance of their faith in his Messiahship, he began to tell them what was before him. Our Lord had previously given some obscure intimations of his future sufferings, and even of his resurrection; as when he said to Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up,"* and when he said, speaking of the temple of his body, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."† But now, for the first time, he spoke of it plainly, and, as St. Mark says, "openly."‡

The declaration or announcement of suffering which our Lord now made was clear. There was neither obscurity nor ambiguity about it. If he had spoken darkly before, now at least he spoke plainly. "He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things." He *must* go: there was a "needs-be" for it; his mission required it. Hitherto his course had been, in a human sense, triumphant; but the hour was fast approaching when the zeal of the multitude in his behalf would be changed into reckless hostility and ruthless cruelty. His path was to be necessarily through sorrow, suffering, and even death itself.

The announcement, moreover, was definite. It entered somewhat into details: where he was to suffer, in what way he was to suffer, and at whose hands he was to suffer. Injustice, cruelty, and death were before him, at the instance of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities of his own nation. Already the disciples had some evidence of the bitter feelings

* John iii. 14.

† John ii. 19.

‡ Mark viii. 32.

with which the chief priests and elders regarded their Master ; they might have even seen that their hatred and malignity were gradually waxing stronger ; but they never anticipated such a climax as that which our Lord now intimated. At all events they had no thought that he would leave himself to be so treated by them. That, assuredly, according to their view, was no part of his mission. Hence the announcement was to them mysterious. Although in words it was plain enough, yet the truth conveyed was startling and incomprehensible. He gave them, indeed, at the same time, an intimation of his resurrection ; yet they could not think of anything beyond his sufferings and death. The Messiah die, and die at the instance of the chief priests and scribes ? It was impossible ! Had he not just admitted that he was "the Christ," and permitted himself to be acknowledged as "the Son of the living God" ? And yet now to say that he must die, and die at Jerusalem, too. Oh, surely there was no necessity for that ! Such doubtless were their thoughts ; but they did not understand the truth. It was very clear that even they had not fully apprehended their own prophetic Scriptures, or they might, to some extent at least, have been prepared for such an issue. But the statement, from its very plainness and definiteness, only startled and confounded them. They did not know, they did not believe, that suffering was to be the Messiah's pathway to reigning ; that he was to pass through death to the Mediatorial crown and the sceptre of the universe ; that by stooping and becoming obedient unto death he was to become a glorious Conqueror. Yet we know now that all this was predicted of the

Messiah in the Jewish prophets ; and hence we almost wonder that those who longed for the Messiah, and looked for redemption in Israel, did not expect some such consummation. He was to be the "despised and rejected of men ; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief," in whom even his own people and nation were to see "no beauty that they should desire him." But the disciples did not apprehend any connexion between this prophetic language and their Lord.

Thus we learn that truth often breaks in gradually upon the best of minds ; so that we need not wonder nor be impatient that the whole of a truth, how important soever it may be, is not seen at once. And we learn, further, how impossible it is, even in the most favourable circumstances, for the human mind to apprehend spiritual truth without the teaching of the Holy Spirit of God.

What was the immediate result of our Lord's announcement ? "Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord : this shall not be unto thee." Peter, true to his character, and following the impulse of the first strong impression, ventures with bold haste to utter his protest against what Christ had said. We may imagine the different effects which this announcement of Christ would produce on the other apostles, according to the individual peculiarity of each. Peter alone spoke ; but what did the others think ? The feeling of John would be that of still and deep astonishment ; the feeling of Andrew that of paralyzed and stricken hope ; the feeling of Thomas that of despondency ; while the feeling of Bartholomew or Nathanael would probably be that of sad perplexity. None of them,

however, ventured to give expression to their feeling but Peter. He is impetuous enough to speak without deliberation, and thoughtless enough to speak most unwisely and improperly. It is as though he had exclaimed, "To suffer many things, and be killed—*be killed!* No, no; this cannot be: it is not to be thought of. Speak not in this way to us." And so he seized the Saviour by his arm or his raiment, rebuked him for saying this, and gave him what doubtless he deemed kind and friendly counsel not to cherish such a thought as that of dying.

The conduct and language of Peter may well astonish us. They betray an inconsiderate familiarity which we could not expect in him. Peter took him, laid hands upon him, and began to rebuke him. We almost tremble for the apostle as he does so. Did he so soon forget the force and majesty of his own saying, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"? Was not this He who had restored, by miraculous power, his wife's mother, when she lay sick of a fever at Capernaum? Was not this He that by creative energy had fed the five thousand from five barley loaves and two small fishes? Was not this He that had walked upon the tempestuous sea, and saved Peter when he was sinking amidst the waves? Was not this the Son of the Highest, the incarnate Son of the living God of Israel, believed and acknowledged to be such by these disciples? And yet here is one of them, the one who had just uttered that noble conviction, a weak, erring, impulsive man, venturing to remonstrate with his Master, and to rebuke him for what he had said. Surely if the place on which Moses stood was "holy ground," if at Sinai

even the great Hebrew leader had said, "I exceedingly fear and quake,"* here the disciple should have felt profounder awe, checking all such familiarity and freedom as Peter now displayed. Subsequently, those who came to apprehend the Saviour in the garden were struck down and thrown backwards by Divine invisible force;† but Peter lays hands upon his Master, and rebukes him, without being destroyed!—so great are Christ's gentleness and forbearance towards his loving though erring followers.

Peter's words and action on this occasion evince also spiritual ignorance. "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." What did he know about it? If his Master and Lord asserted it, should not that have been enough for him? Certainly he did not know better than Jesus; and yet he ventured to speak at the moment as if he did, as if he could enter fully into what the Messiah must or must not do. But he was incapable of judging, and by his thoughtless words only betrayed his own ignorance. Was it not enough for the Saviour to endure "the contradiction of sinners against himself," without being rebuked by one of his own disciples? Truly they were slow of heart to understand and to believe.

And do we not see that Peter's notions of the Messiah were still essentially Jewish? they took shape from the outward, the political, and the material, rather than from the spiritual and the heavenly. The Messiah, he thought, had come to reign, not to die; to found a kingdom, not to offer a sacrifice; to emancipate Judaism, not to give liberty to souls in spiritual bondage; to conquer the foes of Israel, not

* Heb. xii. 21.

† John xviii. 6.

himself to be slain; to ascend a throne, not to be nailed to a cross.

We are never disposed to believe that which we do not like. Persuasion against the natural bias or wish of the soul is very difficult. Peter had just received great and precious promises which conferred upon him signal honour. But if Christ was to suffer and die, what was to become of these promises to him? How would it be possible then for them to be fulfilled? This was a painful and discouraging thought; and as he could see no connexion between a dying Saviour and a glorious King, he at once with vehemence exclaimed, "Lord, this cannot, must not, shall not be unto thee." He did not like to give up the hope which had just been excited in his bosom, the hope of having such a place in the coming kingdom. Alas! how easily and how often our belief of truth is affected by our own personal interests and prospects.

But in the language and conduct of Peter there was a better element than any of these, which it is right to look at. They unmistakably breathe a sincere affection. It was indeed, on this point, a blind, but an ardent and earnest love. Although he expressed himself wrongly and presumptuously, yet he evidently meant it well. He could not bear the thought of his Master suffering, of his being exposed to injustice, cruelty, and death: he would rather suffer and die himself, than that this should happen to his adored Lord. Whoever suffered, he must not. So the language of the apostle was the impetuous expression or outburst of a sincere, though unenlightened love. The whole circumstance is truly natural, as connected with Peter. There is no artificial-

ness about his character ; there is nothing assumed or affected ; he is everywhere true to his own nature ; and even his impulsiveness and ardour, ill-timed as they sometimes were, have not a little in them which commends him to our hearts. Perhaps he thought that the Saviour's recent words of approbation gave him some right to interfere with his plans, and to counsel him as a faithful and loving friend.

Such then, at that time, was Peter's opinion of the death of Christ his Lord. He would not hear of it, but earnestly and with sincere affection repudiated the very idea. He had no thought then of the wondrous sacrifice of Christ for the sins of men. But afterwards how devoutly and gratefully did he come to regard that sacrifice. The idea of a suffering Saviour, which was now revolting to him, became subsequently his hope, his delight, his glory. Hence he says, we are "not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."* He declares that Christ "his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree," and that "by his stripes we are healed."† He assures us that our highest hope comes to us "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."‡ So he came at length to glory in that which he would not at first believe. And there are many now who resemble Peter in this, that they do not like the idea of a suffering Saviour, a crucified Lord. They will follow Christ as their Messiah, if they may believe in him simply as a prophet, or a great teacher, or a moral reformer ; but the idea of his dying for their sins they repudiate.

* 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

† 1 Pet. ii. 24.

‡ 1 Pet. i. 3.

Yet it is in the death of Jesus that there is life for us; and blessed will it be for any who at first reject the thought of a crucified Saviour, to change, as Peter did, so that it may become their confidence and their joy. Thus only can they fully know that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God."

But how did our Lord act under this presumptuous rebuke of his disciple? "He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." He turned round, and looked on the disciples,* that they also might hear the reproof addressed to Peter; for something of the same spirit might be lurking also in them. Peter's carnal zeal is met by the Divine zeal of his Lord and Master; and he who shortly before had been pronounced blessed, and endowed with high honours, seems now, as the words run, to be almost designated by the title of Satan.

One of the most trying and difficult things is the exercise of faithfulness to the faults or delinquencies of a friend. Yet true friendship dictates and demands such faithfulness. So Jesus was faithful to Peter. The very man who had been commended, who had been pronounced blessed, to whom glorious promises had been made, is now openly and earnestly reproved. Jesus could not allow his presumption and carnality on this occasion to pass without remonstrance. The words of Christ might wound him, might for the time damp his zeal, and lead to painful self-examination and reflection; but this was necessary; and that Master who was surpassingly tender, was also Divinely

* Mark viii. 33.

faithful. It was a severe reproof; not more severe, certainly, than the case warranted; but it appears even the more severe from the fact that it was just. "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me." Just as previously he had declared Peter blessed, so much the more severely does he now reprove him, that he may both correct him and preserve the other disciples. But does Jesus here actually call his disciple Satan? On the occasion of his temptation in the wilderness he had addressed nearly the same words to the devil himself.* It cannot be that he really meant that Peter was the devil; but in Peter's language he recognised a suggestion of Satan, and saw Satan using Peter's weakness as the means of throwing an unhallowed temptation before him. Christ doubtless discerned in the temptation Satan lurking behind the natural feeling and the prejudice of Peter; and the apostle, by harbouring such a suggestion, put himself as a hindrance or obstacle in his Master's way. Hence the Saviour said, "Thou art an offence, or a stumbling-block, unto me: thou dost not only stumble and take offence at *my* words, but thou wouldst throw before me a hurtful stumbling-block by *thy* words." There was thus strong and marked severity in this reproof; and although the temptation came from Satan, yet Peter was guilty in allowing it to come through him. Perhaps, elated with the promise that had been made to him, his carnal ambition was excited, and he became an easy prey. So nearly allied at times, even in God's people, is the capability of the loftiest blessing with the evidence of the greatest weakness.

* Matt. iv. 10.

This reproof becomes especially solemn when viewed in relation to Jesus Christ himself. When Satan took the Saviour to the top of a high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, the temptation suggested to him was to leave the path of suffering and of self-denial, and reach dominion by a short and easy road. It was on that very occasion that Christ had said, "Get thee hence, Satan." And now our Lord recognises a temptation of the same nature, from the lips of one of his own disciples. Was it any wonder, then, that he should speak strongly and solemnly, when one of his own friends thus gave utterance to words tending to make him swerve from his purpose, and to draw him from the path of duty? The temptation which assailed him in his disciple's remonstrance was the possibility of escaping sufferings and death; a temptation more dangerous because it came through the lips of one who had just solemnly acknowledged his Divine dignity. Hence he at once detected and repelled the suggestion which aimed at making him waver in his gracious purpose. His holy and consuming zeal of obedience to the Father, his determined self-denial, his mission of suffering, must not be departed from. This was the tender point of his own most peculiar and mysterious conflict, as seen in the shrinking expressed in the words, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."* How solemn, then, was this reproof to Peter, when we consider it as virtually saying, "Thou art my adversary and my stumbling-block: thou art for leading me away from my Father's appoint-

* Matt. xxvi. 39.

ment. Get thee behind me; and tempt me not to shrink from suffering."

There was something humbling, also, in this reproof: "Thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men." Yes; he who had just been declared blessed because he was the subject of Divine enlightenment, is now back again amongst human ideas and carnal suggestions. In these words of our Lord there is that which may perhaps be viewed as, to some extent, exculpatory as well as explanatory; but they show how soon and how far Peter had fallen from the Divine vantage ground on which he had been pronounced blessed. Thus the forward and impetuous Peter once more was wrong. Again he had by his rashness subjected himself to the severe reproof of his Lord. Surely he will now learn his own weakness, and never more offend against that love which had saved him amid the waves, and which now preserved him from being the successful instrument of Satan's wiles. Doubtless Peter would think much and often on the reproof which he now received. What effect it had upon him it remains for the further gospel history to develop.

From this portion of the apostle's life we may learn some useful lessons.

It shows the rashness which is often connected with ignorance. Peter spoke as if he knew better than Christ himself; spoke as if the matter was in his will or at his disposal. And so ignorance often speaks rashly and wrongly when true knowledge would suggest silence and submission.

"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

Peter's conduct shows us also the perilous strength of prejudice. How often like Peter do we decidedly oppose that which, though right and good, is contrary to our opinions or our habits. A doctrine may be true, may be deep and important truth; but if we have not heard it before, if we have not been accustomed to it, if it seems to jar with anything which we have cherished, we are too apt at once to say, "This cannot be!"

Further, the narrative reveals the subtlety of temptation. The suggestion of darkness and of the devil may come to us through the lips of a warm friend who fancies that he seeks our welfare. Satan appears sometimes as an angel of light.* An appeal may be made to our natural feelings, to our love of ease, to our desire for worldly reputation; an appeal which may be very detrimental to our piety. The love which is connected with the ties and joys of this life often comes in the way of the holy love of the Father and the Son. This temptation of Christ by Peter repeats itself in many forms in his disciples, still urging them to consult flesh and blood, and to shun the cross. The suggestion springs up in our own souls when religion presents its sacrifices and trials. Sometimes a love of ease, or a mistaken tenderness on the part of others, counsels us to spare ourselves, and interferes with the dictates of faith and the resolves of duty. But in the service of Jesus the cross must be borne, not shunned. It was through suffering that he was made perfect; and the crucified Saviour became the Conqueror of death and hell. So we become partakers of Christ's sufferings, and march

* 2 Cor. xi. 14.

through tribulation to share his throne. Most true it is, "No cross, no crown." It is the path of self-denial and conflict that is the way to the kingdom. There are propensities to be mortified, temptations to be resisted, and besetting sins to be laid aside. There are frowns to be faced, and enticements to be spurned. The devil and all his works must be renounced, and the world must be overcome. Truly to serve God will often require us to be proof against the love of ease, deaf to the voice of the world and the entreaties of mistaken friends. If we would inherit glory we must take up the cross, and follow the Master, and never shrink from anything that love to him requires of us.

"Christ leads us through no darker rooms
Than he went through before :
He that into God's kingdom comes
Must enter by his door."



CHAPTER V.

PETER ON THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION.

The privilege of the apostles in being with Jesus—The first occasion of selecting three apostles at the raising of the daughter of Jairus—Why this selection—The transfiguration—Where it was—Its nature—Its design with respect to Christ and with respect to the apostles—The effect of the transfiguration—The words of Peter—Their character and spirit—The cloud and the voice—The disciples overcome with fear—Christ's cheering word—Lessons of the transfiguration—It shadows forth the glory of the Redeemer—Shows the true centre of Christianity in the death of Christ—Proves that there is an invisible world—Contemplation neither the sole nor the highest duty of man—The duty of all to hear Christ.

“And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them : and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here : if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles ; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them : and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased : hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them ; and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.”—*Matt.* xvii. 1—9.

“And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves : and he was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow ; so as no fuller on earth can white them. And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses : and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here : and let us make three tabernacles ; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. For he wist not what to say ; for they were sore afraid. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them : and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son : hear him. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.”—*Mark* ix. 2—8.

[Compare *Luke* ix. 28—36 ; *2 Pet.* i. 16—18.]

PETER ON THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION.

IT was the great privilege of the twelve apostles to be the constant companions of the Saviour, and to be admitted by him into close and endearing intimacy. Thus they had the fullest opportunity in public and in private of seeing his daily life; they heard his wondrous words, felt the influence of his pure and heavenly spirit, and were drawn to him by all that could entwine the affections and elevate the soul. But while all were highly privileged, they were not all favoured alike. The same good and sovereign pleasure that had taken them out of the world, to be his apostles, selected certain of them to be witnesses of some scenes so peculiarly sacred that even their brethren were not admitted to be present. To three of the twelve Jesus extended this precious and distinguishing favour. These were Peter and the sons of Zebedee.

As the transfiguration was not the first occasion on which our apostle was associated with James and John in lofty privilege, we may take a passing glance at the previous instance. It was at Capernaum, in the house of Jairus, the ruler or prefect of the synagogue. This man had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, "and she lay a dying."* Knowing

* Luke viii. 42.

something of the might and majesty of Jesus, he came and asked the Saviour to lay his hand upon her.* The tidings of sorrow or suffering never fell upon our Lord's ear in vain. He immediately arose, and followed Jairus. His disciples accompanied him. The crowd, who had been listening to his instructions, followed also, eager and anxious to see what he would do. The miracle of healing the woman with the issue of blood took place on the way; and while Jesus was yet speaking to that woman, servants came from the ruler's house to tell him that his little daughter was dead, and that it was of no use to "trouble the Master." They did not know that Master's power. "Be not afraid," said Jesus to the ruler: "only believe." How full of confidence and consolation were his words. When he came to the house he found vehement demonstrations of sorrow, and said, "Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth;" doubtless referring to that reawakening from the gentle sleep of death which he was about to effect. The people understood him literally, and met his assertion with laughter and scorn. But the noisy mourners were forthwith excluded, and Jesus entered the room where the body lay, taking with him his three favoured disciples into the chamber of sorrow and death. Peter was one of the three: hence this circumstance comes before us as part of his history. This is the first time that we read of any such selection within "the college of the apostles;" but now our Lord makes prominent Peter, and James, and John. We cannot fail to see how this was a glorious privilege to these disciples; nor to

* Matt. ix. 18.

discern, at the same time, how clearly it is against the notion of Peter's sole pre-eminence or supremacy.

These three men formed the inner circle that most nearly surrounded Jesus. It is not necessary for us to suppose that the distinction was arbitrary: it may have been founded on their natural dispositions, on their possession of qualities which commended them to the perfect humanity of our Lord. But be this as it may, on this occasion they were for the first time made prominent. In the chamber of death the two parents were bending over their withered flower in dumb sorrow. Jesus, in the might of his own omnipotence, and from the mercifulness of his own bosom, gave back to them their daughter, in life and health. At his bidding the sleeper awoke from the sleep of death, and the house of Jairus was turned again into a house of joy. Three times do we read, in the course of our Lord's ministry, that he raised the dead—this only daughter, an only son,* and an only brother;† one raised from the bed of death, another from the bier on which he was being borne to the tomb, and the third from the grave—thus showing fully his mastery over death, and proclaiming and proving to us his power to deal with this "enemy" in all its forms and stages. In this circumstance, at the house of Jairus, there were two things that would certainly make an impression on Peter: first, the miracle, in its benevolence and power; and, secondly, the selection of himself, with James and John, to witness it. He could not fail to be deeply touched by such a privilege, and subsequently he must have often thought of it with lively interest and gratitude.

* Luke vii. 11—18.

† John xi. 38—44.

Doubtless it would tend to draw his heart still more warmly and confidently to his heavenly Master.

Another association with James and John comes now before us, in the wondrous spectacle of the transfiguration. This was one of the most remarkable and instructive incidents in the life of the Saviour. It occurred, probably, about a week after the conversation between our Lord and his apostles which we considered in the last chapter; and it took place on "an high mountain apart." What, or where, this mountain was, it is now perhaps impossible to determine. Some insist that it must have been Mount Hermon, in the region of Cæsarea Philippi; but although Hermon was lofty, yet its top was generally covered with snow; so that it was not a likely place for our Lord's midnight retirement with his disciples. The common tradition or opinion is, that it was Mount Tabor; and although this was at a distance of fifty miles from Cæsarea Philippi, yet, as a week had elapsed, there was abundance of time for our Lord to have returned to Galilee. But it is a matter of little importance where the event took place; and as the locality is not defined, it is hardly necessary to detain ourselves by any process of conjecture.

It must have been towards evening when our Lord withdrew, for quiet prayer, to this high mountain. The body of the disciples were left below, and the only persons selected to ascend with Jesus were his three favoured followers—Peter, James, and John. They ascended, probably, with no other thought than that Jesus, as at other times, would continue all night in prayer to God. On the mountain he seems to have retired a little apart from them, though still within

sight and hearing; and as he continued long in prayer, and the curtains of night had closed around them, the three disciples, under the pressure of fatigue, sank down in sleep. Suddenly they were aroused by a dazzling glare of light; and to their great astonishment they saw that a wonderful change had passed upon their Master. The appearance was glorious. "His face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." The fashion of his countenance was altered, and his clothing was "exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth could white it." His garments served only, as it were, to modify the splendour of his body and the radiance of his face. Jesus was no longer alone; for two glorified beings, as visitors from heaven, appeared beside him, and were conversing with him. These were Moses and Elias, "who appeared in glory," the representatives of the law and the prophets, come on this occasion to give testimony and homage to Him who was the great Consummator of all dispensations, and the Divine Reconciler of all things. The law and the prophets met their spiritual meaning, and found their true fulfilment, in him. And how thrilling was the subject of converse between these heavenly visitors and Christ! "They spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem;" as if that were the great theme which stirred the regions of the spiritual world, and filled heaven with sacred interest and admiring joy. Nothing had such an influence there as the death of Christ; for around that all heavenly thought and expectation and triumph revolved.

The purposes of such a manifestation as this on the mount may be said to have been twofold—with a

relation to Jesus himself and to his disciples, and through them of course to us. In relation to our Lord himself the design evidently was to prepare him for the sufferings on which he was about to enter. If we divide Christ's public life into three parts or periods—the first, of miracles, to prove his Divine mission; the second, of parables, to unfold truth and teach the nature of his kingdom; and the third, of suffering, first revealed and then endured—the transfiguration may be viewed as the Saviour's initiation and consecration to the last. To have such a glorious manifestation, with the presence and converse of such visitors, and to have such a testimony from his Father as he then received, could not fail to strengthen the heart and gird up the energies of Jesus for the agony and trial that were before him. It was a solemn and sublime installation to his suffering and closing agony. In relation to the disciples the design was evidently to correct their notions as well as to comfort their hearts. It must have instructed them, slow as they were to learn. They saw that the very thing from which their souls shrunk, and for speaking of which Peter had only a week before presumptuously rebuked his Lord, was a theme familiar to Moses and Elias. They might therefore justly infer that the death of their Master was a thing of deep and solemn interest in the courts of heaven. And now that they were "eye-witnesses of his majesty," they might be convinced that any humiliation through which he had yet to pass could not continue long. This impression was, in truth, made on their minds, and subsequently bore good and abundant fruit in their lives and labours.

What, then, was the effect of this marvellous scene? How did it impress the disciples at the time? and how did they act under it? They had been sleeping, overpowered with night and with fatigue. The sudden burst of light appears to have awakened them; and the first effect of it was confused surprise. "They were sore afraid;" and though they became awake and kept awake, yet they were deeply amazed, and knew not what to think or say. Peter, as usual, was the first to speak, and his words betray his astonishment. Luke informs us, that though he spoke, he was so excited, so overpowered with wonder and awe, that he knew not what he said. Nor can we marvel at this. At night, on the top of a mountain, amidst surrounding darkness, to be aroused from sleep by such a scene was enough to fill them with amazement and fear. Peter seemed for the moment to be lifted out of himself, carried away by the feelings to which the scene gave rise; and he cried, "Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias."*

But, excited as he was, his words show a holy sensibility. He felt what he said, and his utterance was right: it *was good* for him to be there. Surely it was good to be with Christ; good to behold his glory; good to hear heavenly visitors speak of him. In his soul Peter felt it good to be there; and although his views were imperfect, and his notions mistaken, yet he was clearly right in feeling and saying, that the holy mount at that time was a desirable place, and a sphere of rich blessing.

* Matt. xvii. 4.

In his impulsive words there was a holy and loving sensitiveness which commends them to the Christian heart. And is it not always good, now as truly as then, to be with Christ, and to have glimpses of his glory? How often have God's people had to say, in the closet, in the sanctuary, at the communion table, and elsewhere, in fellowship with the Master, "Lord, it is good to be here!" The words of Peter have many times found an echo in the hearts of all who know anything of the spiritual peace and joy of the Christian life. And if it be good to be with Christ, here, amidst the entanglements of the flesh and the interruptions of time, what will it be to be ever with the Lord? It will be supremely, infinitely, eternally good.

But Peter's words manifestly convey also a mistaken impression which he cherished. In accordance with his impulsive nature, he seems to have thrown aside, for the moment, all idea of Christ's humiliation and death, and to have fancied that now at last his Master had assumed his visible Messianic glory; had burst forth in all the blaze and splendour of the Shechinah; and that, thus introduced and inaugurated by Moses and Elias, his reign was about to commence, and all the glories of the ancient prophecies to be forthwith fulfilled and realized. This was surely the beginning, he thought, of all that had been promised to the fathers. But Peter was mistaken, and his request was unadvised: "Let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." It was in itself a strange request; and in some respects its full bearing is difficult to be understood. He wished to continue there; he desired

the present glorious manifestation to abide ; he felt it so good to be there, that he would fain have it to last : but why ? Perhaps, for one reason, he wished to keep his Lord from going down to Jerusalem to die there, supposing that Jesus would have only to continue such an exhibition of glory as that now beheld to draw all men after him, and so have no humiliation or suffering. Thus doubtless there was affection in the request ; and probably an element of national ambition also. He may have had some fear lest Moses and Elias should disappear before their presence would have its full effect : therefore he wished to detain them with Jesus, and to provide them booths for their seclusion and shelter, while he went about to announce this manifestation, and direct his fellow countrymen to repair to the mountain, that they might see and worship their Messiah, now testified to by their lawgiver and their great prophet.

There may have been also something of a selfish element in the request : that he might perpetuate the blessedness and privilege of that hour, the joy of beholding such a manifestation of glory, and of seeing his Lord and Master so resplendent. But although the request was inconsiderate, Peter's words at the same time show a loving submissiveness. St. Matthew informs us that his request was prefaced by, " Lord, if thou wilt." Now he could not be far wrong with such a spirit of acquiescence and submission. He did not wish to do it if Jesus did not approve. This was a wise and necessary condition of his request ; a condition which should be cherished by us always, in relation to all our wishes and petitions. Our wills are often wayward, and our wishes often

unwise. Yet we shall never err much, nor wander far, if we devoutly cherish the spirit which, in reference to all our desires, efforts, and hopes, dictates the words, "Lord, if thou wilt." We may set our minds, our eyes, our hearts, on some supposed good, at present beyond our reach, and we may earnestly ask for it; only let us say, "Lord, if thou wilt." We may have some secret sorrow, some source of anxiety or difficulty or annoyance, like Paul's thorn in the flesh; and we may pray for its removal; only let us add, "Lord, if thou wilt." His will is ever right and best for us.

Peter's request, moreover, breathed a spirit of becoming humility. He wished to make only three tabernacles, not six. He had no thought of tents for himself and his companions. They would be quite willing to be servants. As for Peter himself, he could stand and wait; and most joyfully should he do so if the beatific vision might but continue. He was willing to be lost in the effulgent glory of his Master. And is not this the fitting position for every disciple of Christ? The brightest honour of man is to be the servant of Jesus. Blessed are they who serve, and they who stand and wait, in his kingdom.

While Peter was speaking there came a cloud and overshadowed them. "And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him."* Moses and Elias were immediately enclosed in a far different tabernacle from that which St. Peter wished to make for them. A bright or luminous cloud gathered around them upon the mountain top, and hid them at once from view. The brightness of this cloud is in striking contrast with the "blackness, and

* Mark ix. 7.

darkness, and tempest" on Mount Sinai at the giving of the law; and this contrast significantly betokens the difference between the two dispensations. The bright cloud may be regarded as a sign of God's gracious and glorious presence in the new economy. The effulgence of the Divine majesty was frequently represented in clouds; for Jehovah "maketh the clouds his chariot."* The cloud was the Shechinah; it was the symbol of the Divine presence into which Moses entered on Sinai; it was a cloud which descended on the Tabernacle,† and a cloud which filled the Temple.‡ And in a bright cloud, on this occasion, Jesus, with his two heavenly visitors, was suddenly enclosed as in a sanctuary, while the disciples stood without. Out of that cloud of glory there came a voice which these disciples heard, and which, through them, all the world shall yet know: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him."§ It was the voice of the eternal God installing the Son as the Governor of his kingdom, and commanding him to be honoured and obeyed by men. A similar voice or utterance had come from heaven at his baptism,|| but without the injunction now added, "Hear ye him." The Messiah, the Son of God, who had been for some time fulfilling amongst men his glorious mission, and unfolding to men his Father's name and character, was now formally appointed Lord of all, in presence of the representatives of heaven and earth. His Divine Sonship was declared, the Father's delight in him was proclaimed, and the command was given to listen to him and obey his authority. In

* Psa. civ. 3.

Matt. xvii. 5.

† Exod. xl. 34.

‡ 1 Kings viii. 10.

|| Matt. iii. 17.

this voice from heaven there are what we may call three parts, referring respectively to the psalms, the prophets, and the law ; for its very terms seem to be made up of quotations from these three sources. "Thou art my Son ; this day have I begotten thee : " "Behold my servant, whom I uphold ; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth : " "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me ; unto him ye shall hearken."* Thus the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

The disciples when they heard this voice out of the cloud were overcome with fear. They fell prostrate on their faces, and "were sore afraid." Why were they so affected by what they saw and heard ? It is true their Master was for the moment concealed from them in the cloud ; but might not the very voice which came out of it reassure them ? Yet all the circumstances were so extraordinary that we can hardly wonder at their fear. They had the Saviour's sympathy, and he came to their relief as he had often done before. As they lay prostrate they were raised by his gracious touch, and familiar voice saying, "Arise, be not afraid." What, indeed, had they to fear ? that voice of comfort was enough for them. How gentle and loving, how tender and sympathizing, was their Lord ! He knew how soon poor humanity is overborne by anything extraordinary ; and he would not have his disciples continue prostrate in terror. By word and action he encouraged them to rise. "And when they had lifted up their eyes" the cloud of light was gone, the splendour had disappeared, and Jesus

* Psa. ii. 7 ; Isa. xlii. 1 ; Deut. xviii. 15.

remained alone. Hence it was he, the incarnate Son, that was to be heard and obeyed ; it was neither Moses nor Elias to whom the voice from the cloud referred. Our homage and our worship are due to Him who is to us "the brightness" of the Father's "glory, and the express image of his person."* How often, since then, have the Saviour's sympathetic voice and gracious help raised the downcast, comforted the sorrowing, and cheered the troubled soul? He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever;"† and blessed are they who know his voice, and follow him.

How long the glorification of our Lord lasted on this occasion it is vain for us to inquire ; but it appears, from Luke's narrative, that he did not lead his disciples down from the holy mount until the following day.‡ As they descended, he commanded the favoured three to keep what they had seen a secret till after his resurrection. Why so? In part, perhaps, because the whole vision, to those who had not seen it, would have appeared as an idle tale. It must have been hard for the disciples to obey this command, and to refrain from telling their fellow apostles. But even the impetuous Peter obeyed. In order, too, that there might be no vain boasting on the part of those who had been selected to see the glory on the mount, and that there might be no envy amongst the others, it was not to be spoken of till a time when all might know and think of it with gratitude and joy.

The scene which has thus come before us is very instructive, and teaches important practical lessons.

It shadows forth distinctly the glory of the

* Heb. i. 3.

† Heb. xiii. 8.

‡ Luke ix. 37.

Redeemer. The apostle Peter, towards the close of his life, when he was about to "put off this tabernacle," in running his mind over the various manifold proofs of Christ's majesty, found none so conclusive and irrefragable as the scene which he had witnessed and the voice which he had heard when with his Master on "the holy mount." He declares himself an eye-witness of his majesty, and a hearer of the voice which was from heaven.*

The transfiguration also points out that in which the true power and glory of our religion lie. It is the death of Christ. This theme stirred heaven through all its zones. The Lamb slain in the midst of the throne is on high the object of interest and adoration to all. Halleluiahs are raised, and praises are sung to him as the Lord that liveth and was dead. The strength and power, the grace and glory of Christ's mission, are involved in his death. And if this fact had such an interest in heaven, how vast must be its importance here! Jesus, who accomplished his decease at Jerusalem, is the only Saviour of sinners; it is his death that is the centre of Christianity; it is Christ crucified that is the power of God unto salvation.

How clearly, further, we are taught the fact of an invisible spiritual world. Moses and Elias had left this world many centuries before their appearance at our Lord's transfiguration. Elijah never died, but was translated into the invisible state in a chariot of fire, and went up by a whirlwind into heaven.† No one had seen Moses die, and his body could never be found.‡ Where had they been from the time of their departure from this earth until their appearance on

* 2 Peter i. 17, 18. † 2 Kings ii. 11. ‡ Deut. xxxiv. 5, 6; Jude 9.

this occasion? Doubtless, in a world of happiness, where they knew what was taking place on earth. The future state, even as intermediate, is a state of intelligence and blessedness to all God's people. The appearance of Moses and Elias at the transfiguration does more to teach us about the future state beyond death, and even this only by a glimpse, than all the systems of human philosophy or speculation.

And may we not gather from this scene, that mere contemplation is not the highest end of life? Peter said truly, "It is good to be here;" and, under this idea, he wished to remain where he was. But he must come down from the mount of vision; he must exercise self-denial, and engage in the work of his Lord. So, exertion as well as contemplation, action as well as reflection, is necessary for Christ's disciples in their spiritual life. Holiness needs more, far more than mere supine contemplation, how blessed and inspiring soever it may be. The believer has to act and to endure, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Here also the duty of all men towards Christ is proclaimed. It is to hear him. He is the Son of the Highest—God's well beloved Son; and we are commanded to hear him, to yield him homage and obedience. And yet, alas! the only intelligent creature in the whole universe that is indifferent to the glory of the Redeemer, as here disclosed, is man! The only being in God's magnificent creation that hears the name of Jesus without emotion is man! Man mocked, scourged, and crucified him. Man denies his Godhead, rejects his authority, and blasphemes his name. To the bulk of mankind he is still the great Unknown, "a root out of a dry ground," possessing

neither "form nor comeliness."* Men see no beauty in him that they should desire him. Yet still he loves them, and weeps over the impenitent and the thoughtless. Yet still the Father's voice comes with the tones of majesty and mercy to the nations of the earth, "This is my Son : hear ye him." Have you heard him ? Will you hear him, and acknowledge him as your Lord and Saviour ? The number that know his voice and that follow him is daily increasing. Be not, then, left behind ; for it is only by hearing Christ that you can rise to immortality, and reign in glory. His name is above every name ; and He who said, "Let all the angels of God worship him," says also to us, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."† Nothing in the universe is so terrible as "the wrath of the Lamb."‡

* Isa. liii. 2.

† Psa. ii. 12.

‡ Rev. vi. 16.



CHAPTER VI.

PETER'S FALL AND TEARS.

- I. Jesus departs from Galilee—Comes to Bethany—Sends two disciples to make preparation for the Passover—The upper room—Ambitious discussion among the disciples—Christ rises, and washes their feet—The design of this action—Peter refuses to be washed—The reply of Jesus—Peter again conquered. II. Peter's fall foretold—His protestation—The Saviour's gracious warning. III. Gethsemane—The agony of Jesus—The disciples sleep—The traitor—Jesus apprehended—Peter smites off the ear of Malchus—The Saviour's last act of healing. IV. The hall of the high priest—The mock trial—John and Peter—Peter recognised—His fear—His denial of Christ—The look of Jesus—The apostle's tears—Lessons for us.

AT THE LAST SUPPER.

“After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter : and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now ; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit : and ye are clean, but not all.”—“Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now ; but thou shalt follow me afterwards. Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.”—*John* xiii. 5—10, and 36—38.

[Compare *Matt.* xxvi. 34, 35; *Mark* xiv. 30, 31; *Luke* xxii. 31—34.]

IN THE GARDEN.

“And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death : tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me : nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation : the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again : for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.”—*Matt.* xxvi. 37—44.

[Compare *Mark* xiv. 32—42; *Luke* xxii. 39—46; *John* xviii. 10—12.]

IN THE JUDGMENT HALL.

“And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.”—*Mark* xiv. 72.

[Compare *Matt.* xxvi. 69—75; *Luke* xxii. 54—62; *John* xviii. 10—18, 25—27.]

PETER'S FALL AND TEARS.

EVENTS thicken upon us as the close of our Lord's earthly life draws near, and Peter comes again and again before us. There are several incidents in his history at which we must briefly glance, grouping them together, as they occurred about the same time. Jesus had taken his final departure from Galilee, and journeyed through Samaria towards Jerusalem. Some months had elapsed between the transfiguration and the scenes which we have now to consider.

I. Our Lord spent part of the Wednesday and Thursday of the week in which he was crucified at Bethany, the village to which he so often retired. Thence the apostles Peter and John* were sent to Jerusalem to engage an apartment where the Passover might be kept, and to prepare a lamb for the occasion. For this purpose an "upper room" was secured; and when the evening was come Jesus also repaired to Jerusalem and joined his disciples. He sat down with them to the sacred meal which had been prepared, and which he designed on this occasion to render more sacred and more memorable to them than ever before. This was on the Thursday evening, the evening before the sixth day of the week. When they were seated, but before the commencement of

* Luke xxii. 8.

the repast, Jesus perceived that his apostles, with a strongly selfish and worldly spirit, were discussing amongst themselves which of them should be the greatest in his approaching kingdom. Upon this he rose from the table, and, laying aside his upper garment, he took a basin of water and a towel, and proceeded to wash the disciples' feet. Significant and wondrous act of gracious condescension! Thus our Lord designed to impress their minds, in a way not to be forgotten, with a lesson and an example of that lowliness of mind which had distinguished his own career, and which is an essential condition of true greatness in all his followers. The disciples did not at first understand his object; and they must have thought it strange for their Master thus to conduct himself: but they all, with one exception, submitted to his will. There was one of them who did not approve of this proceeding; and in his impetuous forwardness he declined the offered act of service when his turn came. Peter, from his love to Christ, could not brook the idea of his Master performing this servile office to him: he gave way to his natural temperament, and absolutely refused to allow his Lord to wash his feet.* Jesus gently reminded him that in this act he had a special purpose in view, which they would understand by-and-by. Surely this was enough, and more than enough, to silence Peter's objection: but no; it seemed only to increase his opposition and arm his thoughtless presumption. He vehemently said, "Thou shalt never wash my feet"—awful words to come from the lips of a disciple; as if he knew better than Jesus what

* John xiii. 1—20.

was proper, and as if he would outstrip his fellow disciples in humility. But his respect for his Master in this case was self-willed and mistaken, and his humility was uncalled for and spurious. Submission without argument would have been true humility. Jesus replied in words which pierced the apostle's soul. He knew well how to rule his own household, and he decidedly and strongly said, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." Unless there was the spirit of full submission to Christ, how could he belong to Christ? It was not, however, outward washing only that our Lord meant; for Judas was thus washed on this occasion, and yet had no part with Jesus. Higher truth, therefore, was involved in his words to Peter: as if the Lord said, "Do you object to my washing your feet, as a lesson of humility? Remember that I must wash you, that you must submit to a spiritual washing, involving for me far deeper humiliation than this, or you can have no part with me." This was indeed a decisive, heart-piercing test, and it immediately subdued the presumptuous opposition of Peter, who seemed to apprehend something of the higher truth. No part with his Lord!—rather anything than that. The very idea overwhelmed him; and with impulsive ardour he fled at once to the opposite extreme, and assigned no limit to the spirit of his obedience: "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." But such washing was not necessary, as the action was simply a symbolical and teaching one. "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit." Jesus seems to refer to the fact, that one who had washed in a bath did not need to

repeat the ablution of the entire body, but only to have his feet washed from the dust or defilement of the way; and conveys by implication the truth, that the man who has been washed by "the washing of regeneration" does not need renewal of justification or of the new birth, but only such spiritual washing as corresponded with the washing of the feet. Those who are washed, and sanctified, and justified "in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God,"* are still liable to error and sin, and therefore will often need spiritual cleansing at the hands of the Saviour. On this occasion our Lord secured over his apostle another gracious victory. But what a snare was Peter's natural temperament to him! Surely he has learned at this time a lesson which he will never forget.

In explaining the purpose of this Divine act of condescension, Jesus told his disciples that in the same spirit they ought to be servants in love to each other, and should abandon all worldly and selfish hankering after distinctions or social superiority among themselves. When he had made this explanation the supper commenced, and was celebrated in the usual manner. While the repast was proceeding, Christ pointed out the traitor in a way which filled the disciples with amazement and agitation, and which must have pierced the soul of Judas, if he was not ere that time "past feeling." Then was delivered that wonderful discourse, so rich in precious instruction and consolation, which St. John alone has recorded;† and when it was ended Peter comes before us again in his natural character.

* 1 Cor. vi. 11.

† John xiv. xv. xvi.

II. After they had sung a hymn our Lord and his disciples left the upper room, and went towards Gethsemane, on the Mount of Olives. It seems to have been during this walk that Jesus definitely foretold the fall of Peter.* But allusion appears also to have been made to it before they left the room; for Jesus, as soon as Judas had departed, began to speak of his decease, and told his disciples that whither he was going they could not come.† On this, Peter asked with amazement, "Whither goest thou?" And when the Lord answered that he was going whither his disciple could not follow him then, though he should at a future time, Peter, supposing that some danger was before his Master which he did not wish his disciples to share, exclaimed with his usual ardour, "Why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake." No doubt he was thoroughly sincere in this protestation; but Jesus knew him far better than he knew himself. The same topic was afterwards renewed on their way to Gethsemane. It was late at night when the Saviour departed out of the city with some of the disciples, and proceeded towards the Mount of Olives. As they walked quietly on in the darkness of the evening, our Lord made a solemn announcement regarding the apostles, and their conduct in the circumstances that were about to happen. "All ye shall be offended because of me this night." The Shepherd was to be smitten, and the sheep were to be scattered abroad. This communication was met at once, on the part of Peter, by an ardent and

* Compare Matt. xxvi. 30—34; Mark xiv. 27—30.

† John xiii. 36.

earnest rejection of such a possibility in his case: "Though all should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." Doubtless he meant what he said, and thought he was equal to anything; but he knew not his own weakness and danger. The Saviour, in reply, gave him a gracious warning: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."* Is there not something in the very name by which Jesus at this time addressed his disciple? It was Simon the natural man, the hearer or learner, as the name imports, that was thus exposed to temptation, not Peter the rock, the chosen apostle. Yet our Lord spoke very tenderly and graciously, telling him that he had prayed for him, and showing him what to do when he was restored. Such language was surely fitted to secure his silence, and excite his profound reflection. But no; it was met with a resolute and renewed protestation: "Lord, I am ready to go with thee both into prison and to death." Poor Peter! he thought he was ready to do anything, and prepared to suffer anything, for Christ. Nothing seemed impossible to his ardent affection. How little acquaintance had he with his own heart! Jesus, seeing that no indirect intimation was of avail to impress his impulsive disciple, replied to his vehement declaration by a sorrowful prediction: "I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me."† Such words from his Master! Can he mean it? Yes; he never spoke what he did not mean. Surely

* Luke xxii. 31, 32.

† Luke xxii. 34.

now Peter is at length humbled, overwhelmed, and silenced ; surely he will shrink within himself, and speak no more. Alas, no ! he must have the last word, although it should be against what his Lord had said. Strong in himself and in his imaginary power, he exclaims, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." We shall see the issue.

III. While this thrilling conversation was going on they were advancing to the outskirts of the city, and shortly reached the base of the Mount of Olives. Leaving the other disciples here, our Lord took with him the favoured three, Peter, and James, and John, as the companions of his prayer and the witnesses of his agony. The next scene, therefore, is in the garden. There was an olive farm called Gethsemane, belonging probably to a disciple of Jesus, near the bottom of the mount. When they arrived here our Lord withdrew into the deepest solitudes of the plantation, where he endured that mysterious agony which, in the chilly night, wrung from his brow the perspiration, like "great drops of blood falling down to the ground." The nature and depth of that agony in the garden no human mind can fathom. The disciples, left to themselves, fell asleep. Nature was too strong for them, and they sank overcome with fatigue and sorrow while Jesus was in an agony praying. Once and again he came to arouse them, seeking sympathy, yet finding none, even there in his own disciples. Gently he reproached them, and said to Peter, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" but it seemed of no avail. Again and again they were overpowered with sleep. Nevertheless, he could make allowance for them, inasmuch as he

knew that the spirit might be willing while the flesh was weak.* And if he had not the sympathy and help from his own disciples which he might have justly claimed, he received it from heaven; for "an angel appeared unto him, strengthening him."† In the heavenly strength thus mysteriously communicated he stood up, calm and firm, to meet what was now immediately before him.

By the time that Jesus arose, thus strengthened and victorious, from his agony, his enemies, led on by Judas the traitor, appeared in the garden. They came in force, a multitude armed with swords and staves, probably apprehensive of resistance from the disciples. Judas went before them, and going straight up to his Master, gave him the kiss which was to be the sign for his identification. Jesus, anxious to shield his disciples, advanced to the armed men, and asked, "Whom seek ye?" When they replied, "Jesus of Nazareth," he said, "I am he," and desired them to let his disciples go away unmolested. "As soon then as he had said unto them, I am *HE*, they went backward, and fell to the ground."‡ There was a miraculous force in his words which produced this "involuntary homage of the terror-stricken band." The Saviour was then seized, bound, and given in charge to the Jewish officers, whose prisoner he now became.

On beholding this treatment of their Master the disciples became strongly excited. One of them drew a sword, and smote off the ear of a man who seemed amongst the most forward of the armed crowd. We might readily conjecture, without being told, that this

* Matt. xxvi. 41.

† Luke xxii. 43.

‡ John xviii. 6.

was Peter. He acted as if he wished to show how prompt he was, according to his previous avowal, to defend Christ, and, if necessary, to die for him. This imprudent zeal exposed the impulsive apostle to the power of the law; but our Lord screened him from the consequences of his rashness by healing the wound of Malchus. He thus showed that he went not, even though apprehended, as a captive of the sword; and he rebuked his apostle for his indiscreet and intemperate zeal. Thus the last act of healing performed by our Lord was in favour of one who appeared amongst the most active and resolute of his foes. May we conjecture how Malchus would feel towards him after that miraculous cure? Surely *he* would not be guilty of any further active opposition or thoughtless cruelty. Jesus was then led away, and, according to his prediction a few hours before, all the disciples forsook him, and fled. Yet "He was not alone."

IV. We now come to the circumstances immediately connected with Peter's fall. We follow Jesus to the scene of trial, or rather to a scene of unhallowed mockery under the name of a trial. Two of the disciples turned, and went back after Christ and the officers, following at a safe distance to watch the result. They could not yet give up all hope. Perhaps in the hour of his extremity their Master would assume his power, and burst forth in all the glory of the Shechinah. One of these disciples was Peter; the other, John.* They observed that their Lord was taken first to the palace of Annas, who had been high priest,

* That John was "the other disciple," is the universal persuasion, and seems evident from the way in which that apostle usually speaks of himself. See chap. xiii. 23; xx. 2, 3, 4—8; xxi. 7—20.

and then to the palace of Caiaphas, who was the high priest that year. It happened that John was personally known to the household of the high priest, and of course known as a disciple of Jesus. Hence he obtained ready admittance; and finding that Peter continued lingering about the entrance, John, by speaking to the door-keeper, received permission to bring in his friend. These two disciples were now in the outer court of the palace, where a number of servants and officers were waiting and warming themselves around a fire. Peter joined these servants, and warmed himself at the same fire, as if an uninterested or unconcerned spectator. What a scene presented itself before the disciple! for he could see, if he could not hear, all that passed in the large open room in which Christ's examination took place. In that hall of judgment he saw his Master arraigned before his malignant foes; saw him bound before Caiaphas and those who thirsted for his blood. He saw their cruelty, their scorn, their determined hatred. His Master is at length in the hands of his enemies. Now that which he did not fear and would not believe has come to pass, and Jesus appears at the mercy of his foes. What would become of him? What was to be the end of all this? To see these servants treat his Master rudely, to see them buffet him from side to side, to hear men falsely accuse him, to behold him, gentle, loving, all-benevolent as he was, thus a prisoner arraigned for examination—it was more than he could calmly bear. He is utterly confounded; he loses his presence of mind; his confidence is crushed, and his hopes are fled. He can render no assistance to his Master; and He in whom he trusted for the

deliverance of Israel will not even deliver himself. He scarcely knows what to think or what to do ; when, all at once, he is recognised as a follower of Christ. First one and then another recognises him. He is therefore put in peril for his own safety. The interests of his Master are forgotten in his own emergency. He is accused of being with Jesus ; he is recognised as a Galilean ; he is declared to be one of the disciples of the Nazarene ; he is told that his very speech betrays him : thus he is thrown off his guard ; all the ardour of his temperament, and all its impulsiveness, are sunk into the overwhelming passion of fear ; the most generous, holy, and affectionate feelings of his soul are in a moment chilled and frozen up, and he denies his Lord. With oaths and curses he asseverates, "I know him not !"

Three times Peter denied his Master. The first denial took place at the fire, in the middle of the court, on his being questioned by a female servant. Then he appears to have retreated into the porch or passage leading to the street, where he was again questioned, and again with an oath denied all knowledge of Christ.* This was his second denial. The third denial took place about an hour after, and within the court.† He seems again to have drawn near to the fire, and seated himself amongst the servants, in a position where the Saviour and he could see each other. There, interrogated by several, one of whom was the kinsman of Malchus, he once more denies his Lord ; with oaths and curses declares, "I know not the man." Oh, the weakness, the worthlessness, the wickedness often, of frail humanity ! What a strange

* Matt. xxvi. 71, with Mark xiv. 68.

† Luke xxii. 59.

contradiction of character was here! He who so lately had declared, "Though all should be offended in thee, yet will I never be offended;" he who had so lately protested, "If I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee;" he who scarcely an hour ago had uplifted, in defence of Jesus, his solitary hand against a multitude armed with swords and staves—even he comes and swears to his utter denial. "I know him not," says Peter; and he says it over and over again: he even swears it. "I am not one of his disciples: I know nothing about him: with him and his I have neither part nor lot!" Hush, Peter! there is an eye upon thee. Lo, Jesus turns, and looks upon thee from his place by that tribunal. He has heard thy denial and thy oaths. Why now falter in thy bold utterances? Why does thine excited countenance turn pale? Why gush the tears unbidden into thine eyes? Ah, that look! it has unmanned thee. Why does it so? Immediately, as the Saviour's eye was upon him, the cock crew: then he knew, he felt his weakness, his shame, his guilt.

Try to understand that look. "The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter." It was a look of pain; as if he had said, "Thou, too, Peter! Is it come to this? Do I deserve such treatment from thee? Was it not enough that I had to endure the insolent rage of these priests, the malignant scorn of these servants, the reckless cruelty of these soldiers? Was it not enough to be brought here, and arraigned before my foes, who thirst for my blood? Must this too, thy ungrateful denial, rend my heart, embitter my cup, and intensify my suffering?" It was the look of reproach; as if he had said, "Peter, how canst thou be so

ungrateful, so false, so weak, so cruel? What have I done to deserve this from thee? Was it for this that I called thee from thy nets? that I performed a miracle in thy house on one dear to thee? that I saved thee when sinking amidst the waves? that I unveiled to thee my glory on the mount? Was it for this thou didst acknowledge me as thy Lord, pledge to me thy love, and declare thy willingness to die for me? Shame on thy fickle heart, thy faithless soul!" It was the look of pity; as if he said, "Peter, what art thou doing? Where art thou now? Alas! at the mercy of thy foe and mine. How has he overcome thee, conquered all thy resolution, chilled all thy love, closed up the avenues to thy heart! Wilt thou never learn thy weakness, how much thou needest to distrust thyself, and how helpless thou art when temptation assails thee?" It was the look, too, of intelligence; as if he had said, "Did I not tell thee thou shouldest do it? Did I not say, 'Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice?' and yet thou wouldest not be persuaded. Go, and sin no more; and learn from this experience thine utter weakness and worthlessness. Remember how I spoke of thy conversion—for thou shalt be restored—but forget no more thine allegiance, thy duty, and thy love to me."

Peter can bear no more: that look, thus piercing his heart, completely subdues him. He is melted, broken, overwhelmed. He goes out, and weeps bitterly. Nor is his emotion to be wondered at. Contemplate his tears. "He wept bitterly;" not a little, but much; not silent tears, but strong and painful

crying. "He went out, and wept bitterly." With such a subject for reflection he might well weep as if his "head were a fountain of waters." His tears were tears of sorrow. That face into which he had looked as beaming with the revelation of heaven, was now exposed to insult from his foes. That form which had walked on the stormy sea, in all the majesty of Omnipotence, was now subjected to smiting by ruthless hands. That heart, which had ever throbbed with infinite benevolence, was now torn with anguish. And Peter had increased that anguish, had put additional bitterness into the cup of suffering which Jesus was about to drink. The apostle saw all this now, and wept in bitter grief and penitence. His tears were tears of shame ; and well they might be, when he thought on his conduct, as he heard the crowing of the cock. "Wretched, guilty man that I am !" he is ready to exclaim : "if my Lord is thus to be harassed by his foes, was it for me to augment his anguish, and increase his woe ? If he is to die in ignominy and in torture, was it for me to envenom the gall, and to aggravate the stroke ? Peerless as he is in grace, matchless in goodness, infinite in tenderness, and radiant with purity, was it for me, whom he selected as a companion, whom he loaded with his benefits and blessed with his friendship, thus to embitter his cup ? Was it for me, who so lately spoke the loudest of all in his defence, and who avowed most ostentatiously my faith, thus to aggravate his agony and increase his suffering ? Alas, alas for me !" Oh, how he is ashamed and confounded, and how bitterly he weeps ! But his tears are also tears of hope. In the look which Jesus

had given him he could discover no trace of anger or of vengeance. "Precious Lord!" he is ready to exclaim: "he warned me I should do it. Oh, if I had but thought on his words! But he implied that I should be restored; he declared that he was to die and rise again: all, then, is not lost. He will forgive me, and there will be joy amongst his angels. And oh! if I forget him more, if I deny him more, let him blot out my name—but I will swear no more: enough of the weak, and the rash, and the cowardly have I displayed for ever!" Thus Peter wept; and such were no doubt some of the feelings which, in wild and tumultuous conflict, agitated his bosom as he went from the palace of the high priest. It was indeed a mournful fall: but through the tears of penitence he rose to triumph; through all his falls he became more truly faithful, full of holy love and burning zeal.

May we not learn from this thrilling narrative the danger of self-confidence? We can never too much distrust ourselves, never too much suspect our own hearts, never lean too little on our own strength. It is when the Christian thinks he stands that he is most likely to fall: it is when he is weak that he has the greatest strength. We may see, also, illustrated here, the keen susceptibility of conscience. It may be a silent look, a look of wounded love; it may be some external circumstance, which makes memory active, and arouses the sensitiveness of the moral nature. In how many ways does God provide for right impressions on us! A word, a look, a simple circumstance like the crowing of the cock in this case, may agitate the whole soul, and lead to penitence and faith. It

is wrong to trifle with providential arrangements or events. They may convey the look or utter the voice of God.

How clearly, further, does this history show the grace of Christ. No fierce denunciation of vengeance was uttered against Peter; nor was he left to himself, nor given over to Satan, who had for this time conquered him. The Saviour's eye was upon him for good, for his penitence and restoration. So he is ever full of all compassion, ever ready to rescue and to save.

And the eye that was turned on Peter is upon us. Which of us has not cause to turn aside and weep bitterly? We may not be in the personal circumstances of Peter; but the look of Jesus may not the less fix our regard. Have we not denied him? denied him in our hearts? denied him practically before the world? so denied him in our conduct before men, that they have misunderstood our Master, and perhaps blasphemed his name? Let that Divine, penetrating eye of his fix itself upon us, in all its tenderness and terribleness, in all its majesty and mercifulness, that we may turn aside, and weep bitterly, shedding tears of shame, of penitence, of joy. These tears before such a Saviour will be tokens of blessing and of triumph, as drops of rich refreshing to the soul. We should never forget that he has said, "Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."*

* Matt. x. 33.

CHAPTER VII.

PETER'S PARDON AND RESTORATION.

Peter's thoughts and feelings between the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus—The empty sepulchre—"Go, tell the disciples and Peter"—The Lord "appeared to Simon." I. The Sea of Tiberias—The night of bootless toil—Morning—"Jesus stood on the shore"—His question—The miracle—John recognises Jesus—Peter rushes into the sea, and swims ashore—The meal on the shore—Its purpose and meaning. II. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?"—Asked three times—Peter's reply—Its force and character—Peter's restoration and renewed commission, "Feed my sheep." III. Christ opens the future to Peter—Suffering in the distance, and martyrdom. IV. Peter's curiosity regarding the future of John—Gently rebuked—"Follow thou me"—Lessons from the narrative.

“Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together : and the other disciple did out-run Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying ; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre.”—*John* xx. 3—6.

“And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment ; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted : Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified : he is risen ; he is not here : behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee : there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.”—*Mark* xvi. 5—7.

“And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.”—*Luke* xxiv. 33, 34.

“So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these ? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord ; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me ? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord ; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me ? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me ? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things ; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest : but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me. Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following ; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee ? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do ? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee ? follow thou me.”—*John* xxi. 15—22.

PETER'S PARDON AND RESTORATION.

PETER had denied his Lord. While the very curses of denial were upon his lips the Lord turned, and looked upon him. That look, as we have seen, overcame him, so that he went out, and wept bitterly. The interval between the death and resurrection of Jesus must have been a season of doubt, consternation, and gloom to his disciples; but the feelings of none of them could be so sad as those of Peter. What must have been the state of his mind during the day which had dawned so inauspiciously for him, as he wandered about the precincts of the palace and the prætorium, shrinking from the gaze of the multitude, and, perhaps, still more afraid to meet any of his friends? What must have been his feelings, when he saw Jesus with the purple robe, and the crown of thorns, and the reed given him for a sceptre? when he saw him proceeding up the height of Calvary, faint and weary under the burden of his cross? when he saw him between the thieves, in the horror and agony of his passion, forsaken as it were of heaven, and at the mercy of earth and hell? What must have been his thoughts when he heard the shouts of the multitude, "Crucify him!" "Away with him!" "His blood be on us, and on our children?" What must have been his emotions, when he felt the reeling

earth, and saw the rending rocks, and heard the cry, "It is finished;" a cry that turned the day into darkness, and made the sun hide his head, as if ashamed to shine on such a scene? And what must he have thought and felt when he found that the Master whom he loved and trusted had actually given up the ghost, and that his body was taken to the grave?

Sad and solemn, silent and sorrowful to Peter, was the sabbath that followed, we may well believe. Yet early in the morning of the first day of the week he was at the sepulchre. Already the women have been there; but the place where the Lord lay was empty. Jesus had arisen, had appeared unto Mary Magdalene, by whom the angel at the sepulchre sent a message to the disciples, and especially to Peter. "He is risen; he is not here: go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee."* What an interview then between Mary and Peter, as she rehearsed to him the angel's words. "What!" we can imagine that he said to her, "have you not mistaken the name? Do you not mean James, or John, or Andrew? Were you really bidden to tell me?" Yes, it was true. "And Peter"! the words would linger like heavenly music in his soul, until he saw and recognised his Master. This privilege was soon afforded him. The Lord himself "appeared to Simon;" and this appearance was so much noted that when St. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, sums up the evidences of the Saviour's resurrection, he places it first. "He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures; and was seen of Cephas,

* Mark xvi. 7.

then of the twelve.”* No particulars are recorded of this appearance to Peter, although clearly much importance was attached to it. It was a sacred private interview between the penitent apostle and his forgiving Lord. Fain would we know how Peter behaved himself in the presence of the Saviour; and fain would we learn the words of pardon and assurance spoken to him by Jesus. But of all this we are ignorant; and it is vain to conjecture. At different times, subsequently, our Lord appeared, in or near Jerusalem, to his disciples after his resurrection; but he told them to go before him into Galilee, and it is there that the circumstances occurred which are now to come before us.

I. It was on the shores of that sea, where everything reminded the disciples so forcibly and immediately of Jesus, and where they had so often heard his words, seen his mighty works, and traced his footsteps, that he now met with them. Towards evening one day, a week or two after our Lord's resurrection, Peter said to six other disciples, “I go a fishing,” when they resolved to accompany him. They rowed forth on the lake, and toiled all night in their vocation, but caught nothing. In their bootless task they would probably remember one occasion, on the same fishing ground, when, after fruitless labour, Jesus had miraculously assisted them to success. Be this as it may, when the night of toil was past, and the dim grey twilight of the morning had come, “Jesus stood on the shore;” but they did not know him, even when he first spoke to them, and asked them, in affectionate tenderness, “Children, have ye

* 1 Cor. xv. 4, 5.

any meat?" It was nothing new that one should buy from them; and it only appeared that an early traveller wanted his morning meal, and was waiting for the landing of the fishing boat which he had seen. But when, in reply to their answer in the negative, this supposed stranger told them to cast their net on the right side of the ship, and when the result of so doing showed the more than human wisdom of the counsel, then John, in the keen and tender intuition of a loving soul, recognised Jesus, and said, "It is the Lord." "The Lord!" Instantly there is commotion on board that fishing boat. The announcement was enough for Peter; and he, once more, is the first to act, although John was the first to discern and to know the Saviour. How different his conduct now, from that when, on the previous occasion of the miraculous draught of fishes, he had said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man." Now, with characteristic impetuosity, but much stronger faith, Peter girt about him his fisherman's tunic, and, unable to repress the outburst of his grateful emotions, plunged into the sea, cleaving the waves with his strong arms, that he might be the first to reach the shore, and there cast himself at the feet of his great and glorious Master. The other disciples followed at more leisure, in a little ship, dragging with them the net with its heavy load of fishes. Who can describe the deep and sacred emotion of that meeting, in the early morning hour, when nature was hushed in stillness, and nothing was audible but the ripple of the waves upon the beach?

When the fishes were brought to land, and the toil was ended, the disciples found a fire of coals,

with fish laid on, and bread. The feast had been prepared, perhaps miraculously, by their gracious Lord, who said to them, "Come and dine;" or, as we should say, "Come to breakfast;" for the word rendered *dine* applies to any meal taken before supper. The repast was a silent, and doubtless in some sense, a symbolical one. Our Lord had a significant purpose to fulfil in that morning meal on the shore of Gennesaret. Not a word for a time seems to have been spoken; not a remark, not a question is recorded. We may not be able to discover all the meaning of this mysterious feast; but two or three thoughts seem naturally to be suggested by it. One object of it was the confirmation of the disciples' faith; that they might see and know that he was the self-same Jesus who had drawn them around him as their Master, the same Jesus who had been crucified, and who was now risen again. He affectionately entered once more into the reality of his former life with his disciples, and thus anew manifested his condescending love to them, by affording them his society just as of old. But another object seems to have been, that the disciples might have a symbolical assurance of his care for them while they were engaged in serving him. The feast prepared and provided was a sort of emblematical promise that nothing of an earthly or material nature, that was necessary, should ever be wanting to them in the service of their Lord. He would make their earthly need his care: he would feed and provide for them, if they would be faithful to his claims, his service, and his glory. A third object of this love-feast upon the shore probably was, to supply a typical proof of that

fellowship with his servants, to which he will in all ages condescend. He comes unto them, and sups with them, and they with him. In the spiritual relations which he sustains to his disciples, he visits them, communes with them, and feeds them with heavenly, spiritual food. Nor ought we to forget that in this morning meal with the disciples there is "a significant symbolical representation of the ultimate result of the whole voyage of life, when Christ, in like manner inviting his children to a far more bounteous feast, after all the gloom and weariness of their earthly existence, will welcome them to the other shore, and give them the crown of life."*

II. After this early repast on the shores of the lake, the Saviour turned, and addressed himself especially to Peter: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" This question was at once simple and solemn, personal and pointed. "Simon, son of Jonas!" This was not the usual manner in which our Lord addressed him. Yet thrice he says, "Simon, son of Jonas." He had given him a new name—Peter, the Rock-man. On one occasion after that, when he warned him of his danger, he had said, "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to sift thee as wheat;" for it was the natural man that was in peril, or that brought him into danger. Why address him now, and address him so often, as the son of Jonas? It was probably to remind Peter of his entire past history; to place before him his whole life, from his birth upwards—that he might not forget the deplorable weakness of his human nature; and that, as a sinful man, not merely as a privileged apostle, he might probe his own heart

* "The Risen Redeemer," by F. W. Krummacher, D.D., p. 138.

in reply to the question thus addressed to him. It was not simply the official Peter, but Simon, the son of Jonas, that had to do with that question. The inquiry, therefore, in its character was a thoroughly personal one, personal both to the disciple and the Master ; and it would be specially felt to be so by Peter, in the very thought or fear that he might have forfeited the new name which he had formerly received. The question itself was simple : " Lovest thou me ? " No question could be more simple, inasmuch as no affection is more common or better understood than love. After all that Jesus had done for him, and had been to him, what question could be plainer to Peter than this ? It was not a matter of opinion now upon which our Lord tested him : it was not, " Whom do ye say that I am ? " but a matter of vital principle and inward feeling : " Lovest thou me ? " There are touches of deep meaning in the original which can hardly be brought out in any translation. Two different words are used in the Greek, with different shades of meaning, though both are rendered in our Bibles by the same term, " lovest." The one signifies a feeling of general reverence, respect, and attachment ; while the other conveys more fully an emotion of personal affection. Twice our Lord asks the question by the first term : " Dost thou cherish towards me that reverential and respectful love which is my due ? " Peter, in all his replies, used the other term, expressing a warmer affection, and conveying a deeper feeling of personal love. In the third question our Lord, as if overcome by Peter's emotion and earnestness, adopts his apostle's word, in order to press the meaning of it more closely home to his heart and conscience. And

how much was there in this question to Peter, simple as it is! He had denied his Lord; with oaths and curses he had denied him. His love, therefore, might be doubted, as open to suspicion; and no question would more thoroughly probe his heart and search his soul. Much depended on his reply; everything, in fact, to him, of spiritual life and moral power. And it is no less so still in every case. Love to Christ is the basis of all virtue, the element and stimulus of all progress, and the spring of all obedience. "Without the love of Christ we are like a vessel without mast and without rudder, tossed on the ocean of life; without this love no tie unites us to the heavenly world, and we have laid up no treasure for eternity."*

But there was a point in the question, as addressed to Peter, which should not be overlooked. "Lovest thou me more than these?" This evidently refers to his fellow disciples. Some, indeed, try to explain it of his fishing nets, and means of secular livelihood; but this deprives the question of its true force and meaning. There is an implicit reference to Peter's somewhat vain-glorious sentiment uttered oftener than once before: "Though all should be offended in thee, yet will I never be offended." It is as if our Lord now said, "These love me; thou knowest they love me: dost thou love me more than they do?" thus awakening the purer thought of Peter's mind, and fanning within his breast the flame of holy love—a love no longer unreflecting, or carnally measuring itself with that of others. Here also an opportunity was afforded to the disciple of withdrawing from any improper comparison, or incon-

* "The Risen Redeemer," by F. W. Krummacher, D.D., p. 151.

siderate show of affection, of which he had made himself the subject. What had he, a sinful, fallen man, to do with the measure of the love of others? it was for him to search and try his own heart. In this respect the question was a very pointed one; and its repetition was intended to be cautionary. Three times our Lord pressed the inquiry; and there can be little doubt that in this he had a reference to the threefold denial of his disciple. Thus he conveyed to him a threefold admonition, and a gentle threefold rebuke. The confession was thrice sought, and thrice uttered, that the apostle might remember his lamentable failure and weakness. Yet herein there was goodness on the part of our Lord to Peter; and the repetition of the question could not fail profitably to impress him, and to abide with him for his spiritual advantage.

Not less really is this question put to us by Jesus, and pressed on every reader: "Lovest thou me?" How much depends upon it! Can we reply as Peter did? Is Christ enthroned in our hearts? Does he occupy the chief place in our affections, as our Saviour, our Friend, and our Lord? It behoves every one devoutly to examine himself, and see; for life and happiness depend on the state of the heart towards Christ, and on his enthronement there.

Mark the apostle's reply. The form of it varied a little, but not much; so that we may consider the answers to the three inquiries collectively: "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." This answer was decided and sincere. There was no hesitation, no doubt, no ambiguity in it. Nor did it breathe any vain pretence. It was a quiet, but

firm and determinate reply. He appealed to his Master, who knew his heart and knew all things, and who saw in his disciple's soul true love to himself lying deep down as the strongest feeling of his being. Imperfect and sinful he was; he had acted a weak, ungrateful, and shameful part; but still, through all and above all, there was a true love to the Saviour, which, how much soever it might be eclipsed or paralyzed for the moment, did not fail to assert its force and to appear. It lived in his heart; and Jesus knew it, and appreciated it. The appeal to his Lord's omniscience made it unmistakable and clear.

The reply, moreover, was modest and humble. There was a time in Peter's history, and that not long before, when in answer to such a question he would probably have made the strongest and loudest protestations of his love. "I am sure I love thee. I know that I love thee. Whom can I love but thee?" He does not speak so now: but, "Lord, thou knowest whether I love thee; thou knowest that I love thee:" a tender, beautiful, and modest reply. He appeals from his own truant, deceitful, and untrustworthy heart, to the omniscience of the great Heart-searcher; for his knowledge alone is sure; on it he is willing to rest. Nor was this all. Our Lord had asked him as to the relative intensity of his love; whether it was now according to his former somewhat boastful opinion of it: "Lovest thou me more than these?" It would have been sad for the rest, and dangerous for Peter, if he had said in reply, "Yes, Lord; I do love thee more than these." The question demanded no such

reply, but was pointed and humbling in its form, as Peter evidently felt it to be. There is now no carnal measuring of his love, no improper comparison of it with the love or zeal of others. His humble remembrance did not permit him to enter upon the question of the comparison; and his answer shows that he felt he had to do personally and exclusively with the state of his own heart towards his Master and Lord. Thus his reply was marked by true humility and modesty.

It was also contrite and sorrowful. Peter seems to have heard the first and second question without evincing much painful emotion; but when our Lord asked him for the third time, he was "grieved." It wounded his heart, and pained him; for it seemed to imply a secret mistrust as to his sincerity, some doubt of his faithfulness, some suspicion of the truth or strength of his affection. Could it be that He who knew all things saw foreshadowed some future denial, which led him to receive the disciple's answers with such caution? The very thought grieved him; but it was the grief which the Lord desired to excite. He wished so to humble him as to destroy entirely his self-confidence and self-sufficiency. This interview was the date of a new crisis in Peter's history, and of a new development and start in his inner life.

Blessed, most blessed, are they who can reply as Peter did to the searching question which the Saviour asks. Can we so reply? Can we say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee"? Does Christ see supreme affection to himself in our hearts? We should never forget that our joy and our hope, our salvation and our all, really depend on this

spiritual affection. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha." *

Our Lord was content with the apostle's answer ; so satisfied that he admitted the appeal without reply : as if he had said, "Verily, I do know it ;" for silence in such a case was assent. He forthwith proceeded to reinstate Peter in the position which he had forfeited by his grievous fall, and to restore him to his full honour as an apostle. "Feed my lambs." "Feed my sheep." He was himself about to leave the world, and, as the great and good Shepherd, he required under-shepherds ; so that he passed now from the fishing and the net to a different figure, one found in the pastoral employment. The souls that are caught in the gospel net have to be trained, instructed, and fed.

Here again the terms in the original vary, although the same word, "*feed*," is in our English New Testament. "Feed my lambs" refers simply to the feeding of the lambs, the providing of suitable nourishment for them ; but the expression "Feed my sheep" points to a much wider view of the shepherd's duty, including guidance, attention, defence. And the word for *sheep* in the last commission is not the same as in the second : so that there seems to be a gradation in the range of duty devolved upon Peter, a sort of progression in the position of responsibility and usefulness which he was to occupy. The feeding of the lambs might be the apostolic proclamation of the simple facts of the gospel, a testimony to the "principles of the doctrine of Christ." The "shepherding," or tending of the sheep, might be the apostolic guidance

* 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

and government of the early church. The feeding of the sheep might be the furnishing of the church of Christ, and of the disciples of Jesus generally, with such rich, strong, and precious spiritual food as the apostle subsequently supplied in his epistles. Be this as it may, Peter was restored and graciously reinstated. He rose through tears to a holy and blessed triumph. In token of the acceptance of his love, and as an evidence of his pardon, Jesus told him to go and act as a good under-shepherd to his purchased flock. "Prove your love to me by your acts: guide and instruct my people; care diligently for those whom I leave behind, or who shall believe on me; and show by your zeal and faithfulness the strength and sincerity of your love to me." Thus the great qualification for instructing the lambs and for feeding the flock of Christ is love to Christ himself. This can never be too deeply impressed upon us; especially upon all who are privately or publicly engaged in the Saviour's work. Love to the Lord Jesus is the grand qualification for usefulness in his kingdom.

III. Our Lord did not stop at this point. He proceeded to give Peter a glimpse of what was before him, and of what he had to expect in his service. Now, re-established as an apostle and a pastor, what had he to look for? The Saviour told him that his attachment to his Master and devotedness to his cause would involve a martyr's death. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee

whither thou wouldest not."* The experience of suffering was thus predicted. The time was to come when Peter would need all his firmness, all his faith, and all his assurance ; for he would have to suffer for his Master's sake. But then when the trial came he would be able to confess and endure even unto death. The expressions in the declaration of our Lord seem to refer to crucifixion ; and tradition records that this was the mode of Peter's martyrdom. But in this prediction of suffering there was also the announcement of honour. Would it not be an honour thus to suffer when in and by his death he was to glorify God ? † The intimation which the Saviour gave him would doubtless be much and often in the apostle's mind, encouraging him in duty, and fortifying him in the midst of danger ; so that henceforth his career was one of wonderful devotedness and holy zeal. Now, he was permitted to know that in the Lord's own time and way he should go with him to prison and to death. Jesus intimated to him that he would eventually follow in the path that he had trodden, but gave him the important hint and hope that it would be in mature age, and after a long life of service in his cause. The prospect did not frighten Peter, did not even make him sorrowful. He made no protestations, for he was an altered man ; and he would now leave time and actions to show, that by faithful service he would be ripe for the crown of martyrdom. Thus in his epistles he afterwards speaks with the power of a living experience, concerning the manifold trials and sufferings which are borne by those who are in Christ. ‡

* John xxi. 18.

† John xx. 19.

‡ 1 Pet. i. 6, 7 ; ii. 19—23.

IV. On the same occasion a circumstance occurred eminently characteristic of Peter. He had just heard what was said about his own future course, and on turning round, and seeing John following, he asked, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" To which Christ replied, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me." Peter's question in this case may have been dictated by loving regard for John; as if he had said, "Thou knowest John's love: what hast thou appointed for him? what honour hast thou in store for him? By what end is he to glorify thee?" Or, it may have been dictated by fraternal sympathy: "Lord, shall he suffer? He has ever loved thee, and never denied thee as I did. Shall not he escape?"

At all events the inquiry expressed a somewhat inconsiderate curiosity; a desire to receive definite information regarding the future of John, with which he really had nothing to do. Instead of pondering in silence the great things which had been said to him, he supposed that John would be glad to know something about himself; and once more, unbidden, he asked an unsuitable question.

The Saviour's reply was faithful and kind. "Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me."* Here was a rebuke and an exhortation, the one humbling and the other encouraging. Yet information was conveyed, as occasionally it was in our Lord's discourse, under the veil of apparent refusal. "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" It was Peter's business—his present, mighty, pressing duty,

* John xxi. 22.

irrespective of the future history of others—to follow Christ. His safety and happiness lay in so doing. And to us the same admonition and injunction still come with practical force. To follow Jesus is really the grand business of life. To follow him fully; to follow him lovingly; to follow him constantly. “Follow with your eye fixed on his pattern, and with a prayer ascending for the strengthening aids of his Spirit.”

This narrative as a whole teaches us that love to the Saviour is the element of all godliness and the qualification for spiritual usefulness; that this love is ever evidenced by practical devotedness; that the present duty of following the Saviour is ours, and not speculation on the future destiny of ourselves or others; and that love to Christ, leading us thus to follow him, will bring us to the inheritance of the saints in light, to dwell in his presence, and to behold his glory—

“Where he displays his power abroad,
And shines and reigns the incarnate God.”



CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST GOSPEL SERMON.

Peter's character—His restoration complete. I. The disciples at Jerusalem—Another apostle in place of Judas appointed—Address of Peter—Matthias chosen. II. Pentecost—The outpouring of the Spirit—Immediate effects—Apostles charged with intemperance—Peter's vindication—He preaches—The audience—The discourse—Its character and contents—Scriptural—Simple—Evangelical—Faithful and practical—Effects of the sermon—Formation of the church.

“And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)” &c. “But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judæa, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.”—“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.”—*Acts* i. 15; ii. 14, 15, 37—40.

THE FIRST GOSPEL SERMON.

FROM what has already come before us we have had some means of forming a tolerably correct estimate of Peter, and of the predominating features of his character. With all its imperfections we cannot but think highly of it. He was a man of true and earnest piety, of ardent attachment to his Master, and of great zeal for what he deemed his Master's honour ; while at the same time he had a mind rather quick than accurate in its apprehensions, and feelings rather hasty in their impulse than determined in their exercise. Hence his readiness in avowing his opinions, and his rashness sometimes in forming them ; and hence also the tendency which beset his honest openness to degenerate into a kind of weakness which brought him into difficulty at unexpected forms of danger. His fall, however, and his subsequent restoration—connected as these were with the mysterious events of the Saviour's crucifixion and resurrection, and with the new light which thereby had been cast around his character and work—produced a powerful change upon the apostle's mind ; and from this time forward he appears with the same natural peculiarities, but under altogether a new aspect. He was the first to take action, after the ascension of the Lord, in the appointment of a successor to Judas, and the first

to preach the gospel fully to his countrymen. Both these we have now to consider ; the one, however, as preliminary to the other. We have a glimpse of Peter before Pentecost, and a fuller view of him on that occasion, in the discourse which he delivered to the Jews.

I. Peter's restoration, through the love and grace of his Master, was complete ; so complete that he seems thoroughly to have regained the confidence and affection of his brethren in the apostleship. He was never upbraided by them for his conduct, never taunted with his fall ; a fact of beautiful significance in the apostolic history, and very instructive to us as an exhibition of true brotherly love.

The disciples of Jesus continued in Jerusalem after his ascension, according to his own command, waiting for "the promise of the Father."* They often met together—chiefly, it appears, in an upper room—and "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication," meditating on the past, and hoping for the future. On one of these occasions of meeting they were assembled to the number of about a hundred and twenty ; not the apostles alone, but the disciples generally of the Lord. This is an important point to remember. A new apostle was to be nominated and appointed ; and if ever anything seemed likely to be done by the eleven apostles themselves, it was this. But no ; they did not proceed without consultation and association with the general body of believers. Thus early do we find the principle and the fact that the apostles were not, and did not claim to be, lords over God's heritage.

* Acts i. 4.

It may seem somewhat strange that, as the Redeemer himself had not supplied the vacancy in the apostleship during the forty days that followed his resurrection, the apostles did not wait till they had received the Holy Ghost. Twelve was the number of the apostles fixed and chosen by the Lord himself: that number they probably thought would remain broken or defective unless the gap were filled up. Accordingly they took courage, in faith, to complete the apostolical number. The proposition was made by Peter, and the whole assembly proceeded to co-operate in its accomplishment. He was once more the mouth-piece of his brethren. In his address, making the proposal, there are one or two points of interest well worthy of our notice. He referred to Judas, and recognised in his terrible end the fulfilment of some expressions of Holy Scripture.* It is not necessary to suppose that the psalmist had, in the strict and proper sense, a view of Judas and his office clearly before his mind at the time that he wrote; but that, prophetically, truth was uttered by him which came to have its fit and full application in the case of Judas. Peter recognised this application. We cannot but admire the calmness, the force and clearness with which Peter speaks of Judas in this first speech which he delivers. It was a difficult subject for him to touch. Yet though he had fallen so deeply, he could, after being pardoned and restored, again take his place among his brethren, without being held back by any false humility or exaggerated modesty. The fact that Peter spoke so righteously and strongly about the crime of Judas,

* Compare Acts i. 20 with Ps. lxix. 25 and Ps. cix. 8.

shows us how greatly sins may differ from one another in their nature, guilt, and consequences, according to the state of mind from which they proceed. Yet what but Divine grace had made the one apostle to differ from the other?

In the address of Peter he shows a strong conviction and clear consciousness of the great importance of the apostolic office, and a definite view of its essential qualifications. He said that for any one to be a witness for Christ, and especially a witness of his resurrection, daily or frequent intercourse with Christ during the whole of his public ministry was absolutely necessary. The idea was, that none could be chosen but one who had enjoyed this privilege, and therein approved himself as a faithful disciple. There was no reference to opulence of natural endowments, or respectability of social standing. Integrity, truth, and experience were the qualities required, founded in, and sanctified by personal intercourse with Jesus. Hence we see that the apostleship as an office was peculiar, and that the apostles as such could in reality have no successors. "Apostolical succession," therefore, in the Romish sense, is at once a superstition and a snare.

The discourse of Peter seems to have had the desired effect on the infant church. Action was taken; two brethren were nominated; and an appeal was made to the Lord himself to show which of the two he had chosen. The means used to ascertain this were such as had been used, and even enjoined, in certain cases, on the Jews in their own dispensation.* The lot was taken; prayer was offered;

* Numb. xxvi. 52—56; 1 Sam. xiv. 21; Prov. xvi. 33.

Matthias was chosen, and numbered with the eleven in the apostolic body. It was not, therefore, merely apostles ordaining an apostle, but the apostles leading, the church acting, and the great Head of the church deciding and blessing.

II. The hour approached when Peter and his brethren were to see many things in altogether a new light. Pentecost was at hand. The fulfilment of the promise of the Father in the outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon the Christian disciples, to an extent and with a power unknown before, has rendered this day memorable in the history of the church. It is necessary briefly to consider the circumstances connected with this wondrous occasion; otherwise we shall not fully understand the scope of the first gospel sermon. "When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place."* They had continued, in obedience to the Lord's command, to assemble and pray. In the spirit of confidence and hope they watched and waited. Whatever might be the obscurity of their views at the time, they trusted in their Master, and devoutly complied with his injunction. Soon the blessing came for which they waited, and then they understood how it was "expedient" even for them that Christ had gone away.† Thus the important lesson is taught us, that the attitude of waiting and of prayer is the attitude for which God reserves his highest blessings. When they were assembled together, "suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of

* Acts ii. 1.

† John xvi. 7.

fire, and it sat upon each of them." What was seen, and what was heard, were but the outward indications or physical symbols of mighty spiritual power. "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Then the glory of the Shechinah passed from Judaism to the church of Christ, and the power which bestowed the gift of tongues showed an agency which would heal the confusions of Babel, and bring about the true brotherhood of humanity. And mark the immediate consequences. The multitude of Jews and proselytes, probably an unusual number on account of the occurrence of the feast, when they learned what was taking place, came together in great excitement and curiosity, and heard "in their own tongues the wonderful works of God." They were confounded; they could not understand it; and in their amazement they said, "Are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" "What meaneth this?" Yet there were some, most probably the native Jews, who, knowing several of the apostles by sight, but without understanding the speakers, sneeringly attributed the extraordinary manifestation to the influence of intoxication. "These men," they cried in mockery, "are full of new wine." This brought Peter forth; and in his discourse on this occasion we have the first preaching of the gospel by the apostolic body.

Behold the preacher. The painful experience through which he had passed has doubtless left some traces of its influence even on his countenance. He now appears a more thoughtful and a sadder man, with

that pensive sadness which is often the accompaniment of deeper joy. Yet there is a light of unwonted brightness in his eye, and a firmness in the expression of his features which discloses the highest assurance. He knows now what he did not know and what he would not believe before. By the effulgence and force of spiritual light vouchsafed in the outpouring of the Spirit, he sees now the meaning of all the past, and the hope of all the future. That death of Jesus which he had deprecated is now viewed by him in a very different light, and henceforth is to be the principal theme of his untiring and zealous ministry. That cross which he had repudiated is now the bond which will bind him for ever, by the ties of love, reverence, and true life, to his risen and glorious Lord. Henceforth it is to be his glory. Now he stands forth with new courage in his soul, because he has new light in his mind and new life in his heart. True to himself and his own natural temperament, he is the first to speak on this occasion. Undaunted by opposition or ridicule, he rises to vindicate the apostles of Jesus, and to defend the cause of the Saviour himself from a blasphemous and reckless charge, as well as to preach the gospel to the crowd that had been drawn together by curiosity. Thus was he to lay the first foundation stone of the Christian church upon the Rock of Ages, and to have the gracious promise of his Lord partly fulfilled in his instrumentality at this time. What a change had taken place upon the man! He who had trembled, and prevaricated, and lied before a maid-servant, was now bold before a mighty throng, and with unhesitating voice proclaimed the truth. This very change, from

its nature and extent, in the case of Peter and his fellow apostles, is one of the most striking evidences of the truth of the evangelical narrative.

As the apostle speaks we may look at the audience. While some were disposed to laugh and mock at the whole matter, many were seriously impressed, and struck with the phenomenon. But who were they? A motley group indeed. "Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians." Here we have a minute catalogue of nations and peoples from Europe, Asia, and Africa, from islands of the sea, and from regions whose full extent had been untraversed by foot of man; men of different aspects, different languages, different habits, and widely different histories. Such was Peter's congregation upon this occasion; consisting of Jews and proselytes who had been born in these different countries, and who were permanently, or for the time, residing at Jerusalem. Indeed, many of them may have been brought thither from an impression that the time for the advent of the Messiah was completed, and from the wish to be present in their own land when he did appear. Evidently, however, up to this time, Jesus of Nazareth, as the expected Messiah, had grievously disappointed them.

There are several important points indicated by the presence of such a diversified audience on the occasion of the first gospel sermon. We see here the publicity of the gospel. It was not to be

taught in private, or unfolded to the initiated as human systems had often been. It was not to be a thing done by priests, but was a truth and a life proclaimed to the world of men. Hitherto the common people had been neglected and despised; but now was introduced a system not only adapted for all, but which was to be publicly preached to all, without reserve, or mystery, or secrecy. The apostles had now and henceforth to "speak to the people all the words of this life." This fact likewise indicates the benevolence and mercy of the gospel. The preaching of Peter on this occasion was a fulfilment of the Saviour's command to begin "at Jerusalem,"* that even those, who had been guilty of rejecting and crucifying him, might have the offer of salvation through the blood which they had so wickedly shed. The gospel, moreover, was to undo the curse of selfishness and the evils of dissociation. Now was exhibited exactly the reverse of the dispersion that took place among the nations by the confusion of tongues at Babel. The hearers of Peter, though doubtless mostly Jews and proselytes, were representatives of the whole world, brought together to listen to the same glorious, quickening truth, as they stood side by side. Thus, by the gospel of Christ, the broken fragments and disjointed elements of humanity are to be drawn together into a new unity, and God's idea of brotherhood for the race is to be realized. We can perceive that the effect of the new dispensation would be for the destruction and removal of all that formerly alienated and divided men from each other, and for the formation of a new body, in which there was to be

* Luke xxiv. 47.

neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, but all should be one in Christ, and Christ himself all and in all. Hence, in this diversified multitude, hearing on this occasion the first sermon, we can gather something at least as to the design and influence of the gospel.

In the discourse delivered by Peter we see the beginning of that work to which the apostles were chosen and appointed, and for which they had received strength from on high. It is not our business here narrowly to examine or expound the sermon ; but we must glance at some of its general features, as being the first public proclamation of the gospel, and as containing some of the peculiarities of the apostolic preaching.

It was remarkably Scriptural in its texture. Peter, after quietly denying, and showing the foolishness of, the charge of drunkenness against the apostles, commenced his discourse by declaring that the events which, to those present, had become a subject either of astonishment or of mockery, were really the fulfilment of a well known prophetic promise. He quoted the language of Joel, and wished his hearers to recognise a relation between the prophecy and the facts before them. He inferred, not only from the outpouring of the Spirit on that day, but also from the striking and threatening language against the heavens and the earth associated with that gift in the announcement of Joel,* that the last period, or closing dispensation, had commenced. The outpouring of the Spirit was the commencement of the end : the dissolution of the heavens and the earth was to form the completion of the end. He showed the connexion

* Joel iii. 28—32.

of the effusion of the Holy Ghost with the resurrection of Jesus, and pointed also to that glorious fact as shadowed forth and predicted in ancient Scripture. The language of David in the 16th Psalm he applied to the risen Saviour, and showed that it had its highest fulfilment in him.* Thus he endeavoured to prove Scripturally that the circumstances with which they were that day surrounded were the accomplishment of prophecy; and that the new economy thus inaugurated was but the flowering, as it were, of the ancient stem. There was no drawing upon his own imagination, no attempt to find an explanation by the mere flight of fancy, but a quiet and luminous exposition of the bearing of God's word upon the fact and spectacle then present. And this Scriptural mode of preaching continued to be the apostolic mode, and has the advantage, surely, of being still the best mode, comparing, as it does, spiritual things with spiritual, and wielding, specially for the destruction of sin, the sword of the Spirit.

This discourse, moreover, was simple in its method. It was substantially a statement of facts, with a reference, as we have seen, to the bearing of prophecy on them, and their application to the circumstances and duty of the hearers. There were few reflections and reasonings, no new and unknown dogmas as themes for speculation, but simply the proclamation of historical verities. Of these facts Peter declared himself a witness, along with the other apostles. He preached nothing that he did not know, or had not experienced as a fact. It was a declaration of the mighty works of God as seen in the

* Ps. xvi. 8—11.

history, passion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This was the sum and substance of the discourse; showing the fulness of the gospel in the life and death, the resurrection, ascension, and present reign of the Saviour. The events of the Redeemer's history were the points of its truth and the elements of its power. The apostle referred to the earthly life and to the present position of Jesus of Nazareth, and in corroboration of his statements appealed to the testimony of known fact, and to the memory and consciousness of his hearers. By what we may call a threefold argument he showed that Jesus who was crucified was both Lord and Christ. He appealed to the Divine approbation of the Saviour, as manifested in the wonders, signs, and miracles which he wrought; he appealed to his resurrection, of which he and his colleagues in the apostleship were witnesses; and he appealed to the gift of the Holy Spirit that day vouchsafed.* Thus the discourse as a whole revolved around Christ, and took its form and power from the facts of his illustrious and wonderful history. In this way Christianity appears essentially historical; and that preaching is most apostolical and best which points men to the incarnate Son of God, and tells them how he lived and worked, how he died and rose to glory, that he might be the object of their faith, their homage, and their love.

Peter's discourse was thus thoroughly evangelical in its character. This term is well understood, although perhaps somewhat technical. In the statement of these facts about Christ the design of the

* Acts ii. 22—24.

preacher was to show, that the liberty, purity, and safety of the human soul are found only in connexion with him. It was not a mere matter of abstract truth with him : he wished to prove to the mighty throng before him, that the facts of that day, and the previous facts which the event of that day established, had a bearing on them, on their happiness and salvation. It is easy to gather from the apostle's statements and appeals on this occasion, the doctrine of pardon only through the cross, of repentance only at the cross, and of regeneration only by the truth of the cross. The grace of the Spirit is through the work of Christ: the blessing of the one and participation in the other are only through faith in the name of Jesus. Hence, to unfold the personal glory and mediatorial achievements of the Christ of God, and to draw men to him as their Saviour and Lord, was manifestly Peter's design in this discourse.

It was also faithful and fearless in its spirit and utterances. There was no reserve, no hesitation, no holding back of unpalatable truths. He reminded the Jews of their wickedness, and boldly charged them with the murder of Jesus Christ. They had crucified the Saviour, and crucified him by cruel and wicked hands ; and Peter fearlessly told them of their great sin. The fact that God had raised the crucified Saviour from the dead did not diminish their guilt in the matter. We cannot but admire the fidelity of Peter : in truth, we almost wonder at it when we remember his former timidity. How great the change that had passed upon the apostle ! He who shrunk from the recognition and accusation of a female servant now unblushingly charged the Jews with the

murder of Christ! He appealed to their consciences, to their memories, and to their hearts.

Finally, this sermon was manifestly and altogether practical in its aim. It was for no barren speculation or empty reasoning that he stated these facts and made these appeals. It was to convince the Jews of their danger, and to lead them to seek forgiveness and salvation in Him whom they had so wickedly crucified. Hence he urged on them repentance and faith, the necessity of submission, and surrender to Christ as their Lord and Saviour; for thus only could they be forgiven, renewed, and saved. His design was therefore eminently practical. Faith and repentance should be the practical aim of all ministration, so that men may know that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

The effects of Peter's discourse at this time were impressive and marvellous. The mockers were put to silence, and the spirit of thoughtful and anxious inquiry pervaded the vast assembly. There was, first, conviction. Conscience asserted its power and did its work. The hearers cried out with deep feeling, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Their impressions were followed by decision and surrender. They "gladly received the word." The faithful saying of the gospel met with their cordial acceptance. Christ became their Saviour through faith in his blood, and they became new creatures in him. They received life and liberty from on high through the death of Him whom they had slain.

Then came profession. They "were baptized." They wished henceforth to be followers of Christ, and they received the symbol of purification, the rite which

betokens admission to his visible kingdom or connexion with it. There was no preparatory instruction, no preliminary examination, and no delay. They were at once baptized on the avowal of their repentance and faith. "And the same day there were added about three thousand souls."*

Thus the Christian church was formed ; and Peter, whose sermon was so largely the means of converting these three thousand souls, was honoured to lay the first living stones of the great spiritual building which is still rising, and of which the top stone will in due time be brought forth with shoutings of grace and joy.

* Acts ii. 41.



CHAPTER IX.

THE MIRACLE AT THE BEAUTIFUL GATE OF THE TEMPLE.

After Pentecost the apostles were new men—Perform signs and wonders.

I. The cripple at the temple gate—His appeal to the apostles, and Peter's reply—The miracle—Its effect on the man and the multitude. II. The excitement from the miracle—Peter addresses the crowd—The substance of his address. III. The apostles apprehended while speaking—The Sanhedrim—The arraignment of Peter and John—Their recognition—Peter's fearlessness and fidelity—The astonishment of the rulers—Their perplexity and decision—Peter's reply on hearing the decision.

“Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God.” “And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?” &c.—*Acts* iii. 1—9, and 12.

“And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.” “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.”—*Acts* iv. 1—3, and 13—18.

THE MIRACLE AT THE BEAUTIFUL GATE OF THE TEMPLE.

AFTER the day of Pentecost the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ seemed to be new men. They were no longer timid, fearful, and doubting, but bold and courageous. They now knew the truth of the Saviour's words—how it was expedient for them that he should depart, in order that he might send the promised Comforter and Guide.* The humiliation of the past stood revealed to them, and the future was lighted up with glory, but with a glory very different from that which as Jews they had been wont to expect. Their career as the ambassadors of Christ and the heralds of the gospel now fairly began—a career which knew no pause till most of them received the crown of martyrdom.

We are told that in the prosecution of their work "many signs and wonders were done by the hands of the apostles." A particular instance is given, not, perhaps, as the most remarkable in itself, but as one from which some important consequences resulted. And as Peter was specially concerned in this case, the circumstances necessarily fall under our observation.

* John xvi. 7.

The chief points of the narrative gather around three things: the miracle itself, the discourse which arose out of it, and the apprehension of the apostles which followed.

I. Peter and John were proceeding to the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour, or three o'clock p.m. As they passed the "Beautiful Gate" a lame beggar asked alms of them. Peter answered his appeal, and earnestly regarding the poor cripple, in order to arrest and fix his attention, as well as to judge whether he was fitted to receive the kindness intended, said to him, "Look on us." Doubtless the man looked very eagerly, in the hope of receiving some valuable donation: "he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them." The first words of Peter—"Silver and gold have I none"—would consequently appear a mockery to his eagerness and his need. But the apostle immediately added, "Such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." This, at the first view, might have seemed an absurd command, and even an additional mockery to one so impotent and helpless; but the lame man understood the words aright. He felt that neither insult nor deception was being practised on him, and he gave confiding and earnest heed to what was said. Life and power rushed into his limbs. Peter took him by the hand, and helped him up; and forthwith he followed his deliverers into the temple, "walking, and leaping, and praising God." Never before had he set the sole of his foot on the ground so as to use his limbs, but now he could both leap and walk. The miracle was manifest

and unquestionable. The man on whom it was performed clung to the apostles, as they made their way to Solomon's porch; and the people, recognising his familiar face, and gathering from his language and his gestures what had taken place, ran together from all quarters to the spot "greatly wondering." Peter, again the spokesman, seized the opportunity of addressing the multitude.

II. The discourse which he delivered on this occasion was marked by the prominent characteristics of his sermon on the day of Pentecost. Seeing how earnestly the multitude gazed on those who had performed a work so marvellous, the apostle reproved them for their unmeaning and bewildered astonishment at the miracle; intimated that they would have seen no ground for such surprise if they had taken the right course to form a true judgment; and disclaimed for himself and his fellow apostle all inherent power or authority to do such a work. Jealous for his Master's honour, he endeavoured at once to lead their thoughts away from the human instruments or organs of the miraculous operation, and told the multitude by whose power it had been accomplished,—who, in fact, was the real author of the mighty work. He sought their admiration for his Lord by informing them that it was Jesus, "the Holy One and the Just," "the Prince of life," whom they had so recently killed, who had made the lame man "strong;" that through faith in his name the miracle which astonished them had been done. He pressed home upon their consciences the guilt of their conduct in the Saviour's crucifixion, and revealed the sinful infatuation of their cry before Pilate's tribunal, "Not this man, but

Barabbas ;” thus showing that they preferred the life of a murderer to that of their own Messiah.* The apostle led them back to the beginning of the sacred history of their nation, to the times of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, and declared the miracle to be really the act of the God of the patriarchs, who had “glorified his Son Jesus,” whom they had crucified and slain ; and that it was through faith in this crucified one that the impotent man was made whole. It was evidently the apostle’s purpose to bring before them the relation in which they stood to Jesus ; not only to impress them with their guiltiness regarding him, but especially to show, that as the lame man had been healed by submitting to the name of Christ, so blessing and glory would come to them in the same way. The course which they had pursued towards the Saviour, and the cruelty which they had shown to him, had been “through ignorance.” Hence the hope of forgiveness was held out to them in the mercy and saving might of Jesus. The apostle urged them to repent, and be converted, and assured them that, by repentance and consecration to Christ, they might still individually and collectively secure their part and place in the glorious spiritual kingdom which he had come to establish. And, to support his earnest exhortation, he declared that to Jesus and his work all the prophets gave witness ; that Divine blessing and heavenly refreshing could only come to their nation and to the world through him ; and that the Jew who would not listen to Christ as the Prophet foretold by Moses, and the promised seed of Abraham, could have no part in the true restoration of Israel.

* Mark xv. 7.

He entreated them without delay and with hearty acceptance to embrace the gospel, in order to hasten on the predicted period of coming light, and purity and peace.

III. Such a discourse as this, so pointed, judicious, and faithful, was well calculated to excite the minds and feelings of many of the hearers. Accordingly, while the apostle was speaking, or when he had just finished, a report of his proceedings and words was carried to the Sanhedrim, then sitting in a room close at hand. The members of this high court had perhaps expected to hear no more about Jesus. He was dead, as they hoped or supposed, and his poor illiterate followers did not seem men likely to revive his cause or to make any noise in the world. In cherishing such ideas the rulers were mistaken; and that which they thought had probably come to an end was only in reality begun. But the facts of Pentecost and the proceedings of this day so alarmed them, that they resolved at once to do what they could to stop the progress and crush the influence of the apostles.

In this spirit and with this resolve "the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees," came upon Peter and John.* The priests were displeased that men of no education or standing should take on themselves the duty of public teaching; the captain of the temple probably saw in the excitement some danger to the public peace; and the Sadducees could not brook the proclamation of facts regarding the resurrection of Christ which went to the direct overthrow of their system of infidelity. Besides, the name which the apostles preached, and in which

* Acts iv. 1.

they had performed the miracle, was repugnant and hateful to all these parties. Peter and John were therefore apprehended; and as it was towards evening when this was done, the authorities ordered them to be kept in prison till the following day, when they should be examined. This was the first experience the apostles had of the treatment which their Lord had taught them to expect,* and the first positive act of hostility which the infant church had to encounter. Their apprehension rendered it necessary that a meeting of the Sanhedrim should be summoned. To this court it belonged to decide, so far as Jewish legal authority was concerned, whether the apostles were to be regarded as messengers of the living God, or as impostors and seducers of the people. Accordingly, on being brought before the rulers next day, they were questioned, "By what power or authority have ye done this?" The miracle itself was neither denied nor doubted. The members of the Sanhedrim well knew that the cripple had been cured: it was the cure in the name of Jesus, instead of the name of Jehovah; that was the great cause of offence, and the ground on which they wished to convict the apostles of blasphemy or idolatry. Peter proceeded at once to answer the question, and spoke boldly to the same purport as in his discourse on the preceding day. It was the lawfully constituted authorities of the Jewish nation that placed themselves thus openly in opposition to the apostles, and to Christ their Master; and Peter felt it incumbent on him in the plainest terms to declare the whole truth. He distinctly stated the authority and the power by which the miracle had

* Matt. x. 16—18.

been done, again pointed out the guilty conduct of the Jews in their treatment of Jesus, and asserted that although, in his low estate of humiliation, he had been condemned and crucified by their authority, yet God had shown him honour, and had highly exalted him as the Saviour in whose name rested the only hope of salvation for all men. The sacred narrative informs us that Peter, in making his reply to the question of the Sanhedrim, was "filled with the Holy Ghost," so that on this first occasion of open collision with the rulers we have a fulfilment of the Lord's promise to his disciples, "When they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: for the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say."*

The boldness with which Peter addressed the Sanhedrim astonished the members of that court, and frustrated their plans. They saw that the apostles were, socially, men of the common or lower class, who had received no education; and they were amazed at the confidence and freedom with which they spoke. Their wonder sharpened their recollection: and "they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."† They remembered having seen both of them in the company of the Saviour, probably on the occasion of his trial.

The incident thus referred to supplies one of those undesigned coincidences, which frequently tend much to confirm the truth of the gospel history. "Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and

* Luke xii. 11, 12.

† Acts iv. 13.

went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter."* There can be little doubt, as has been previously shown, that the disciple who was thus known to the high priest, and who introduced Peter into the palace, was John himself.† They were together on that memorable occasion, and now they were recognised together again. Yet this recognition arose from their manner before the Sanhedrim. The influence of the facts with which they were conversant, and of the presence of Christ which they at that moment realized, made them bold and fearless, so that their conduct savoured of his power and of fellowship with him. Blessed are they whose spirit and course among men necessarily lead to such recognition as this. It may subject them at times to trial, difficulty, or persecution; but great is their felicity, and great will be their reward, who so constantly commune with Christ as to show the influence of spiritual converse with him in their daily life.

After their defence and confession, the apostles were commanded to go aside out of the council for a short time, that the rulers and elders might confer among themselves before coming to any decision on the case. The fact of the miracle was so manifest, and the spirit of the apostles so intelligent and courageous, that the members of the Sanhedrim could not bring themselves to condemn them as impostors or false prophets. Nevertheless, it was necessary to make some show of authoritative opposition. Accord-

* St. John xviii. 15, 16.

† See *ante*, p. 115.

ingly, they came to the extraordinary conclusion that, though a notable miracle had been done, yet they must put down the men who had wrought it ! Hence, when the apostles were called into court again, they were threatened, and commanded to speak no more at all, or teach in the name of Jesus. As soon as Peter and John heard this decision, and received this order of the Sanhedrim, they answered as with one heart and voice, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."* Thus the rulers found to their surprise, that the apostles would not accept the liberty offered to them on any such conditions as were now attempted to be imposed. Not to speak any more in the name of Jesus, their Saviour and Lord ! It could not be. The very idea of such silence was abhorrent. Without hesitation or doubt, they opposed their own knowledge and convictions, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, to the authority of the Sanhedrim. The gospel to them was not a mere matter of opinion, but a glorious series of facts with which they were personally conversant and familiar ; the truth of which they knew, and the force of which they felt. They testified that which they had seen with their eyes, which they had looked upon, and their hands had handled, of the word of life.† Against such testimony as this the authority of the Sanhedrim was powerless ; and the rulers, after further threatening Peter and John, liberated them unconditionally.

In contemplating the conduct of the apostles on this occasion, we cannot help being again struck with

* Acts iv. 19, 20.

† 1 John i. 1.

the marvellous change which had taken place in them. The very man who with oaths and curses had denied his Lord, now boldly, and in the name of that Master, avows his determination to obey God rather than men, and in the face of fiery opposition preaches the gospel of Christ. How transforming is the power of that gospel, and how mighty is the true knowledge of the Saviour, when revealed to the soul by the Spirit of the living God. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature."* Happy is he whose heart and life give evidence of the quickening, renewing, and elevating power of "the truth as it is in Jesus."

* 2 Cor. v. 17.



CHAPTER X.

PETER'S PART IN THE CASE OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA.

Peter the first preacher and the first sufferer—He returns from prison to his own company—New manifestation of the Spirit—Community of goods—Its nature—Neither obligatory nor permanent—Barnabas—Ananias and Sapphira—Their conduct—Its character, guilt, and consequences—Why such visitation of God?—Its influence—More miracles and renewed persecution—Another opening of the prison by an angel—The judgment on Ananias a protection to the church, and a warning to all against hypocrisy and worldliness.

“ But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things. And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.”—*Acts* v. 1—15.

PETER'S PART IN THE CASE OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA.

WE have seen that Peter, who was honoured to be the first preacher of the gospel, was also honoured as the first to suffer from the opposition and malignity of its foes. From the court of the Sanhedrim the apostolic history conducts us into the midst of the Christian church. Peter and John "being let go, went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them."* This report was the ground of thanksgiving and prayer on the part of the whole Christian community at Jerusalem. They gave praise to God for the triumph of his truth by his servants, and prayed that with all boldness they might continue to proclaim his word. In evident answer to their prayer, the place in which they were assembled shook, and a renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit assured them that their living Lord was with them, to enable them to persevere in the face of all difficulty and persecution. Thus the triumphs of the gospel multiplied, and the church increased. The company of the disciples was full of life and love; oneness of heart and soul prevailed amongst them, and "they had all things common." This was altogether a new state of things, out of which arose the

* Acts iv. 23.

circumstances in which Peter again appears before us. They supply a striking illustration of the authority and power with which the apostles were invested, and doubtless afford the true interpretation of the "power of the keys."

In order to understand these circumstances, it is necessary to glance at the "community of goods," which, for a time at least, prevailed in the church at Jerusalem. "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common."* This statement is somewhat startling and extraordinary: what does it mean? The state of things here described was evidently the expression or outcoming of that gush of heavenly and unselfish love which pervaded the church, in the fulness and freshness of its new life. Converts multiplied; the Lord added daily to the church such as should be saved; the whole body was instinct with life and love; and it was felt a desirable thing to adopt that community of life which our Lord and his disciples appear to have practised before.† Hence they proceeded to surrender their individual property, and resolved not to look upon anything as belonging exclusively to one's self, but to have all things in common. Whether this is to be understood as intimating that all the converts relinquished the whole of their private property, or that there was only a partial community of goods, in which every one was willing to do all that he could for the happiness and comfort of the rest, it is, perhaps, difficult to say. Several points connected with it should

* Acts iv. 32.

† John xii. 6; xiii. 29.

be observed. It was a spontaneous outburst of affection, and showed the force and fervour of that new principle which they had received through faith in the crucified Saviour. As the expression of their new-born love to him, it was an entirely voluntary act. Certainly it was not imposed upon the new converts, or exacted from them by the apostles, but originated in their own free will, so that it was in the power of any individual not to fall in with it. This we learn decidedly from Peter's language to Ananias, "Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?"* Further, it was a thing naturally suggested by the exigencies of the infant church. The converts in Jerusalem, by the fact of their adhesion to Christ, doubtless suffered the loss of temporal goods, in so far as they were dependent on the favour and patronage of others. So deep an offence against Jewish prejudice would cast them loose from Jewish charities, and a state of destitution in the case of many would inevitably follow, rendering necessary, on the part of more prosperous disciples, extraordinary exertions and measures. The response made to this great emergency is found in the fact, that men who had lands sold them for the common good, and no one said that his possessions were his own. Hence "distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." Moreover, it is to be observed that this plan is found only in the church at Jerusalem. No trace of its existence is discoverable elsewhere. On the contrary, the apostles speak frequently in their epistles of the rich and the poor in their social distinction and respective duties.

* Acts v. 4.

Perhaps the community of goods did not answer even in Jerusalem, for the church there continued very poor, and Paul encouraged collections among the churches of Asia Minor and Greece for "the poor saints" in that city.* This constant charitable remembrance of the churches and Christians in Judea, by the disciples in other parts of the world, points to some peculiar causes of destitution there which did not exist elsewhere in the same degree. There is nothing, therefore, in this temporary and local arrangement which is binding on us, beyond the principle of love, of which it was an extraordinary expression. The practice actually enjoined upon the early Christians by the apostles was, that every one should lay aside, week by week, as "God had prospered him." But the very fact of the recommendation of this plan of "a weekly offering" shows that the other plan of a community of goods was not apostolically ordained, and was neither general nor necessary. There can be no doubt that it would have been well, so far as liberality to the cause of God and humanity is concerned, if the apostolic injunction had continued to be generally observed in the Christian church; and when this method of consecrating property, by weekly storing, is again generally adopted by the people of God, the amount cast into the treasury of the Lord for the support and spread of his gospel will be greatly increased.

The sacred historian gives two instances of the practice of selling property for the general good,—the one adduced as an example, the other as a warning. The former is the case of Barnabas, who

* Acts xi. 29, 30; Rom. xv. 25, 26; 2 Cor. ix. 1, 2.

afterwards became so eminent as a companion and coadjutor of the apostles. The latter case, with which we have more immediately to do, is that of Ananias and Sapphira. It was natural, in such a state of feeling as prevailed in the church at Jerusalem, that the devotedness and the disinterested love of those who surrendered property for the common good, should appear to great advantage, and be much applauded. Any who had property and held it back would in some respects be in an anomalous position, and likely to be held in less esteem. This idea at all events seems to have been entertained by a disciple named Ananias, and the feeling was shared by his wife Sapphira. They loved the praise of men, and were not content to be held in less consideration and respect than such men as Barnabas. But, on the other hand, they were worldly, avaricious, and influenced by that root of evil, "the love of money." How to make a compromise, therefore, was the question with them; how to appear to be as generous as others, and at the same time retain their hold on a large portion of their property; how to secure the good opinion of their fellow disciples at the smallest cost or sacrifice to themselves. No doubt, as husband and wife, they talked over this matter, and congratulated themselves on discovering a plan which would secure both objects—gain the respect of the church, and at the same time keep a great part of their property in their own hands. It was known that they possessed an estate, which they now resolved to sell. But though all might know that it was sold, it was not necessary for any of the disciples to know

how much was got for it. It would be very easy to give into the hands of the apostles, for the common stock, a certain sum as the whole produce of the sale, and to keep the rest as a secret treasure for themselves. It was seemingly a well concocted plan, but with one very great oversight,—they left God out of the reckoning, and forgot that it was impossible to deceive him. Nor did they remember that all sin brings punishment, in some form, along with it, and sooner or later certainly finds out the transgressor. When we attempt to analyze this act of Ananias and Sapphira, various features of it painfully impress us. It was deliberate. It was manifestly a plan on which they had agreed. Sapphira, not knowing what had befallen her husband, put forth the same lie as he had done, thus giving evidence that they had mutually resolved upon the course which they adopted. Falsehood uttered on a sudden emergency is bad; but falsehood deliberately determined on is much worse and far more heinous. Their conduct therefore was guilty in the highest degree, and combined in itself various sins. They showed a sordid vanity in the desire to be thought to do as others were doing, and in the ambition to secure the esteem and honour of their fellow disciples at any cost. This principle of vanity often engenders an unhallowed emulation which leads to recklessness and social ruin. There was the vilest hypocrisy also in their conduct. They pretended to be what they were not; they wished to be regarded as holy, generous, and disinterested, while they were deceitful, double-minded, and worldly. Nothing is more hateful to God or dishonouring to man than such hypocrisy; and nothing is really more con-

temptible in the world. But "the hope of the hypocrite shall perish." Falsehood, too, was prominent in the course which they pursued. They intended to deceive the apostles and the brethren. It was a lie not only to men, but to God, to the Holy Ghost abiding in the church, and in the apostles as its rulers and superintendents; and when Sapphira was questioned about it, she upheld it openly and without shame. Thus their conduct was extremely sinful: every aspect of it was evil, and we cannot wonder at Peter's awful sentence upon it.

It was somewhat strange that, in a time of miracles and extraordinary manifestations in the church, it did not strike Ananias and his wife that the apostles might probably, by vision from God or otherwise, be made aware of their hypocrisy. Such, at all events, was the fact. Peter was apprised of their whole proceeding, perhaps by special revelation, or in virtue of the faculty of "discerning of spirits," by which the apostles were sometimes empowered to read the hearts and characters of others. But, in whatever way informed, he knew the plan of Ananias and its hypocrisy; and as the case was to furnish a law or principle for all such occasions in future, he must be the spokesman. Accordingly, when the man came with his money, and tendered it as the produce of his entire estate, he was confounded by the stern and solemn voice in which the apostle addressed him:—"Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God."* So base and wicked a falsehood Peter

* Acts v. 3, 4.

ascribed at once to the father of lies ; and with this assertion he pronounced the first word of condemnation upon Ananias. The charge was an awful one, but just and truthful. It was a lie specially in connection with the cause of God ; a deceit practised on those who were filled with the Spirit of God. The Christian community at that time was pervaded by the presence and power of the Holy Ghost, and to impose on it was to lie unto God. Peter spoke warmly, decidedly, fearlessly, and in the name of the Lord. His opinion of such conduct, though severe, was just ; and his appeal was penetrating and powerful, not less to Sapphira when she came in, than to her husband previously. In mercy, however, he gave her an opportunity of correcting herself—an opportunity, in fact, of repentance, by asking a question and allowing her time for reflection. “Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much ?” * asked the apostle. But Sapphira’s heart was hardened, and she made herself even more guilty than her husband, by deliberately and resolutely confirming the fraud, when a “place for repentance” was given her. Peter, therefore, declared the crime and announced the punishment, as he had done in the husband’s case.

The visitation of God was immediate and solemn. At the words of Peter to Ananias, “Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God,” the guilty man was overwhelmed, and without uttering a word fell to the ground a corpse. Unquestionably this was the judgment of the Almighty, whether viewed as accomplished through natural means, in the shock given to the frame from the power of conscience and the horror of

* Acts v. 8.

exposure, or regarded as a Divine and instant punishment on the offender by supernatural means. Peter did not pronounce sentence on him ; but God doubtless designed that for his sin he should die. The punishment denounced against Sapphira renders the case clear, as an express and awful visitation of God. The apostle judicially sentenced her : " Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out." Thus in the same moment she heard of her husband's awful end, and of the instant approach of her own ; and she immediately fell down dead. By this solemn visitation God's cause was vindicated, sin terribly punished, and the purity of the church mercifully preserved.

The holiness of the Christian community was especially and impressively set forth in the retribution which overtook Ananias and Sapphira, so that " great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things."* But lest this " fear" should operate in any way against them, there was at the same time an augmentation of miraculous power graciously vouchsafed. The sick in Jerusalem, and multitudes of the subjects of disease and infirmity brought from other places to Jerusalem, were healed ; and the very shadow of Peter, as he passed by in the street, is described as being sought after on account of its miraculous efficacy. It certainly was not without significant meaning and purpose, in this early history of the church, that the man who had been the means of detecting, and of so fearfully punishing, the hypocrisy of Ananias and his wife, should thus be made the instrument and depository of such super-

* Acts v. 2.

natural power. But the holy awe which his presence could hardly fail to inspire was not for himself or for his own honour, but for the glory of his Lord, in the establishment and furtherance of his cause.

The hostility of the Jewish authorities was kindled anew by these things, so that the apostles were again apprehended. But He that was for them was more and mightier than all that could be against them: the doors of their prison were opened at midnight by an angel, and the prisoners set free, with the Divine command, "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life."* Instead, therefore, of being found in the prison in the morning, they were found in the temple; and on being brought before the Sanhedrim, Peter again, for himself and his brethren, avowed his determination to obey God rather than men. On this occasion the moderate counsels of Gamaliel prevailed; and the apostles, after being beaten, were dismissed, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the Saviour's name. To Peter and his fellow apostles that name manifestly became more and more "all, and in all."

With regard to the case of Ananias and Sapphira it has been asked, and fairly asked, Why such a visitation as this descended on them? why was such severity manifested? We can see various reasons for it, and reasons which seem abundantly to justify it. The iniquity of Ananias was the first instance of evil detected within the sacred circle of the church, and it required to be visited in a manner that would be a sign and a warning for all future ages. Moreover, it seemed good to the Head of the

* Acts v. 20.

church thus to confirm apostolic authority. This was of very great importance just at the beginning of the church's progress and triumph. The settlement and arrangement of order, offices, and ordinances, rested with the apostles; and it was necessary that their authority should be acknowledged and respected. This visitation would solemnly show to the disciples generally, that the apostles were specially the agents and servants of the Most High; so that their will would have the force of law, and all their injunctions be considered and received as binding. Thus, in judgment no less than in mercy, was their apostolic authority confirmed.

This visitation was also designed to preserve the purity of the church. In the extraordinary circumstances of the time, with miracles abounding and a variety of gifts prevailing, many would naturally be led to come forward wishing to share in these gifts and blessings, without possessing any religious principle or spiritual life. In this way, and with this desire, Simon the magician subsequently came forward. But the effect of the awful visitation on Ananias was to create a wholesome fear on the minds of the people, so that we are told, "of the rest," those who did not believe and were not sincere, "durst no man join himself to them."* Church purity is always important, but at that time, in the first age, it was especially so.

The judgment of God was thus, too, pronounced on hypocrisy. Nothing is more abhorrent to him, and nothing, perhaps, more injurious to his cause amongst men, than hypocrisy in the church. It is an Achan,

* Acts v. 13.

which hinders blessing. By this terrible visitation the Head of the church sought to warn men against it for ever. Had it passed then without signal punishment, the effect on the church of Christ might have been very injurious. And although liars and hypocrites may not now be struck dead in a moment, yet falsehood and hypocrisy, in connexion with his kingdom and cause, are still no less offensive to him.

Further, by this terrible judgment worldly mindedness was openly branded and condemned. The Saviour himself had repeatedly declared and taught, that a man "cannot serve God and mammon." Here was a presumptuous attempt to do so at the outset of the church's history, and it was necessary to mark it. Worldly mindedness, sordid attachment to this world's property, is unworthy of the man who claims to be a subject of the kingdom of heaven. The Christian knows, or ought to know, that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."* Yet there is perhaps no evil in the church at this moment more wide-spread, or more withering and injurious, than worldliness. God, in this awful visitation, branded it for ever as an evil which he abhorred and which should be resolutely shunned by his people. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."†

Thus the case of Ananias and Sapphira, by the judgment of Peter and the visitation of God, shapes itself as a beacon and a sign for all future ages of the church.

* Luke xii. 15.

† 1 John ii. 15.

CHAPTER XI.

PETER'S ADDRESS TO SIMON THE SORCERER.

The effect of persecution in the church at Jerusalem—The dispersed disciples preach the gospel—The duty of all Christians to make known the glad tidings of salvation—Philip in Samaria—The effect of his preaching—Simon the magician—His baptism—Peter and John go down to Samaria—They dispense the gifts of the Spirit—Simon desires to possess their power—His proposal to the apostles—Peter's reply to him—Difference between the case of Simon and that of Ananias and Sapphira—The features of Peter's address to the sorcerer—Rebuke and exhortation—No evidence that Simon profited by this event—Lessons of the *narrative*.

“But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one : to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also : and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John : who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost : (for as yet he was fallen upon none of them : only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter : for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.”—*Acts viii. 9—24.*

PETER'S ADDRESS TO SIMON THE SORCERER.

How often in the history of the church has God made the wrath of man to praise him. This was signally illustrated in the results of the death of Stephen, the first martyr. Through the persecution which then prevailed "against the church which was at Jerusalem," the disciples were "scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria."* The dispersion had the effect of spreading the gospel still more widely ; for "they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word." And it is worthy of notice that in this case the apostles were not the preachers : for some reason which is not recorded, and about which it is almost vain to conjecture, they remained in Jerusalem. The scattered disciples, smarting under the persecution which had driven them from their homes, felt it a privilege, wherever they went, to proclaim that Saviour by whom they had been set free from ignorance and guilt. So all who have received the gospel and felt its power are not only warranted, but required, according to their opportunity and ability, to hold forth "the word of life." Although in the church there are offices and ordinances with distinct functions,

* Acts viii. 1.

yet every believer may be in some way a preacher of "the glorious gospel."

The sacred historian does not give us particulars of the missionary labours of these early Christian disciples, but proceeds at once to state some facts regarding the ministry of Philip, one of the seven who had been chosen specially to attend to the claims of the poor in the church at Jerusalem. He "went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them."* In general the Samaritans, even in the time of our Lord's personal ministry, appear to have been more disposed than the Jews to receive Divine truth; and now among them on this occasion the gospel of Christ found a kind of stepping stone in passing from the Jews to the Gentiles. "The bridge between Jerusalem and the world was furnished by Samaria." The preaching of Philip, accompanied by signs and wonders, had an extraordinary effect; and "the people with one accord gave heed" to the things which he said; so that "there was great joy in the city."

Here Philip came into contact with a man named Simon, who had up to that time exercised great power over the minds of the people by his skill in the resources of magic. So high were the pretensions of this impostor, and so strong was the impression he had made on the people, that they not only received with readiness all that he taught, but believed him to be "the great power of God." The preaching of Philip, however, supported as it was by mighty and beneficent miracles, dispelled this illusion, and induced the multitudes to renounce their allegiance to Simon and to become avowedly disciples of Christ. Through the

* Acts viii. 5.

loss of his followers, and by what he saw and heard in the preaching of Philip, the sorcerer was himself deeply impressed; so that he "believed also," and was baptized. He continued for a time with Philip, evidently because he saw the evangelist's influence with the people. According to Justin Martyr* and others, Simon was a native of Gitton, a town of Samaria; and this well agrees with the fact that he was at this time pursuing his practices among the Samaritans. Probably, on seeing the miracles which accompanied Philip's ministry, he thought that the worker of them was a magician of some higher order than himself, and that it would be wise on his part to submit to him, in the hope ere long of being able to participate in the deeper knowledge and to wield a similar power. Accordingly he avowed himself a disciple of Jesus. In this profession, so far as his knowledge of religion went, he was, perhaps, to some extent sincere; but it is very clear that in his case baptism was neither the sign nor the means of spiritual regeneration. In fact, the case of Simon distinctly proves that there is no necessary connexion between the outward form, by whomsoever administered, and the inward grace which alone can effect a spiritual and saving change of heart.

When the intelligence of Philip's success reached Jerusalem, Peter and John went down to Samaria to confirm the new converts in the faith, and to confer upon them those spiritual gifts which were so largely enjoyed in the primitive churches. During the visit of the apostles, Simon perceived that by the imposition of hands they dispensed the extraordinary gifts

* Justin Martyr's 1st Apology, cap. 26.

of the Holy Ghost ; such, probably, as the gift of tongues, and other miraculous powers. It is evident that the communication of the Spirit which is here in question must have been outwardly discernible ; so that Simon saw its results, and became anxious to possess the power of imparting the same gift. The authority to convey or bestow these extraordinary influences seems at this time to have been still reserved for the apostles ; and when the impostor saw them exercise it by the laying on of hands, he attempted to induce them to impart the power to him by offering them money. In his view it was a mere outward thing ; and since in external commerce everything may be had for gold, he did not see why he might not buy this wonderful gift. The proposal which he made with this intent has been branded with infamy by the Christian church in the very name, *Simony*, which came subsequently to be given to every purchase of ecclesiastical offices or spiritual dignities. His request or application to the apostles was marked at once by the grossest ignorance and the greatest arrogance. It clearly showed that he knew nothing of the purity and power of the religion which he had so thoughtlessly professed, and that his motive in professing it was carnal ambition—a desire to be able still more fully and widely to impose on men, and to exercise his power over them. How did the apostles deal with his proposal ?

It was Peter that took this case in hand, and spoke for himself and his fellow apostles. He instantly and indignantly repudiated the offer that was made, and exhorted Simon himself to repentance and to prayer for pardon. We can hardly fail to be struck

with the marked difference between the apostle's treatment of this man and his previous dealing with Ananias and Sapphira. In the latter case terrible retribution at once followed ; but here, while severe rebuke was administered, the impostor was not utterly cast off, but exhorted to repentance. Whence this great difference ? The reason may be found in the fact that Simon, to some extent at least, was in ignorance, and laboured under a mistake or misconception ; while in the case of Ananias and Sapphira there was neither mistake nor ignorance. "They lied unto the Holy Ghost ;" but of Simon, sordid as he was, it might still be said that he knew not what he did. He had made a trade of sorcery and pretended spiritual power, and prized religion only according to the amount of show or sensation that it was capable of making. Hence, when Peter and John appeared, and showed such miraculous power, he naturally coveted the same ability, and thought he might get by purchase higher gifts than he had ever yet possessed for producing outward and astonishing effects.

But though his case was mildly dealt with, as compared with that of Ananias, yet in Peter's words to him there was significant and terrible force. They conveyed an awful rebuke : "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money."* The apostle took it for granted that *he* would perish along with his money, if he continued in the state of mind which his proposal indicated. The denunciation has reference to the perishableness of all worldly property, and of

* Acts viii. 20,

those with it whose chief aim is simply to acquire it. In this truth there is instruction important to all, showing as it does the necessity of using the world without abusing it, and teaching that sordid worldliness leads to corruption and to destruction. In Peter's language, too, there was a very solemn and humbling assertion regarding Simon's spiritual condition: "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter;" "I perceive thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." Although he had professed his faith in Christ, and although he had been baptized, his proposal gave the most unmistakable evidence that he knew nothing of the power of the gospel, and had no spiritual apprehension of or participation in the blessedness of religion. So one single sin may be of such a nature as to show, as certainly as many sins, that there is no spiritual life and no true piety in the soul. Simon was still under the influence of the bitterness and the bondage of iniquity, bound to evil as with the strongest cords, and without any real knowledge of that truth which alone could set him free. And is it not so with multitudes who profess and call themselves Christians? They have been baptized, they may have a place and a name among the disciples of Jesus, but they are still in darkness and sin. The gospel is outwardly or nominally received, but without any corresponding change in their souls or their spiritual condition.

Peter's words, moreover, contain a clear explanation of the source and ground of Simon's sordid proposal: "Thy heart is not right in the sight of God." This wrong-heartedness lay at the root of all. Hence he

loved money, and popularity, and social influence, more than God. His governing motive and main-spring of action were altogether wrong. His heart was polluted; for rightness of heart would not have admitted the carnal and selfish mixture of spiritual intentions with material or temporal advantages. The heart is ever the citadel of goodness or of badness in man. It is still "the heart of unbelief" that departs from the living God; and wrong-heartedness, more than wrong-headedness, lies at the foundation of infidelity and vice in all their forms. How transcendently important is it, then, to have the heart right in the sight of God.

The apostle's address to Simon closes with an earnest exhortation to repentance and to prayer. "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee."* There are some who say it is wrong to ask an unconverted sinner to pray, because no one can pray acceptably without faith in Jesus Christ. The apostle had no such narrow and scrupulous theology as this; he could urge even this deceiving and deceived man to repent and cry for pardon. Prayer is the natural utterance of the burdened soul, even before there is any full evangelical knowledge; and certainly the gospel neither checks nor forbids it. Repentance and prayer, comprehending all the inculcations and duties of Christianity for such a case as that of Simon's, constituted the true remedy for his sin. With God alone lie the prerogative of forgiveness and the power of deliverance from spiritual bondage; and to the penitent, praying soul,

* Acts viii. 22.

these blessings would not be denied. Yet there does appear a little uncertainty in Peter's language, as to whether Simon's sin may not have come under the awful category of those which are unpardonable: "if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." The nature of the iniquity, as against the Holy Ghost, may in some degree account for the expression of uncertainty with regard to forgiveness; and the doubt, thus to some extent at least suggested, may have been thrown in by the apostle to increase Simon's motives to repentance and to prayer. And observe, it was the thought of the heart that had to be forgiven. Many seem to think that if their words and actions are outwardly proper, God's law has nothing to do with their thoughts. But "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he;" and the Saviour assures us that sin exists in the thoughts and desires of the heart, out of which proceed all those evils which defile and destroy the man.*

One point in Peter's words on this occasion is very important, showing as it does how the apostles understood the Lord's promise regarding the forgiveness of sin. On meeting with them after his resurrection he had said, as he breathed on them, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."† It is manifest that Peter did not understand this language as many of his self-styled successors have understood it, and as they have presumptuously and arrogantly used it. He did not claim any delegated power of absolution, but referred the pardon of sin to God alone, leaving it to him in

* Prov. xxiii. 7; Mark vii. 21—23.

† John xx. 22, 23.

his sovereign power and mercy. Hence he exhorted Simon to pray to God for forgiveness, knowing that this was his prerogative, and that it belonged only to him.

There is no evidence that Simon profited by this faithful and urgent exhortation. He seems to have been only afraid of condemnation and punishment, and, instead of praying for himself, requested the apostles to pray for him: "Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of those things which ye have spoken come upon me."* He was more anxious to be delivered from any painful consequences of his conduct than from his sinful heart. He wished the punishment to be averted, without having any idea of becoming a new man in the thoughts and aims of his own life. The New Testament contains no further statement regarding him. Justin Martyr says that he subsequently went to Rome, in the reign of Claudius Cæsar, where he attracted much attention, and gained such reverence that he was worshipped as a god; and Eusebius, the ecclesiastical historian, reports that he continued at Rome, in the enjoyment of great reputation, until the reign of Nero, when his popularity was destroyed by the arrival of Peter.† But all that we really know is, that he was a great impostor, detected, rebuked, and warned by the "apostle of the circumcision."

The whole of this narrative is fraught with important instruction, and should not be lightly passed over.

It teaches us, as we have seen, that errors in religion generally originate in a wrong state of heart. It is the "evil heart of unbelief" that departs from God,

* Acts viii. 24.

† Euseb. Eccles. Hist. lib. ii. cap. 13, 14.

welcomes doubt, and follows wayward theories and sceptical systems. How much force, then, is there in the precept of Solomon, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."* In truth, a greater than Solomon speaks in this command as given to every man.

It teaches us that every profession of religion is worthless which is not accompanied and evidenced by a change of heart. The new man, the new creature in Christ Jesus, is that alone which commends the religion of the Son of God. Multitudes profess to be Christians who have no inward, living experience of the power of the truth. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."†

It proves that neither baptism nor any external rite is of avail to change the heart. The sign should never be mistaken for the thing signified. The doctrine of baptismal regeneration, how earnestly soever inculcated and how sincerely soever believed by some, is a delusion and a snare. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."‡

We see here, also, that the only escape from wickedness is in repentance and prayer—a turning from sin and a turning to God with full purpose of heart. "Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ," are still the duty and the need of sinful men. The elements of sincere and acceptable piety have been the same in every age, and the utterance of the truly pious soul has ever begun with the prayer of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." It

* Prov. iv. 23.

† 2 Cor. v. 17.

‡ Gal. vi. 15.

is manifest, therefore, as we further learn here, that true religion always involves and requires personal application to God. It is not in any case a matter of proxy. Simon, when urged to repent and pray, asked Peter to pray for him, instead of praying for himself. So have multitudes done. They look upon prayer by a minister of religion as a thing of mysterious power, and trust to it, instead of seeking for themselves in the sight of God a change of heart. Many take refuge in the piety of a father or the prayers of a mother. This is a great delusion which has been the injury and the destruction of myriads. Each man has to bear his own burden, and each one for himself must repent and be forgiven. There is room for all in the gospel, and sufficiency of grace for all with God; and Christ says to each one individually, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

Finally, this narrative teaches us that men often seek deliverance from punishment without seeking deliverance from sin. Such a desire may arise from the influence of mere carnal fear. It sometimes leads to that which is sincere, spiritual, and true; but perhaps more frequently its blossom goes up as dust. God's salvation is salvation from sin, as well as from hell; and we reach its glory and feel its power only when it makes us hate evil and seek to perfect holiness in the fear of God.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WALL OF PARTITION BROKEN DOWN.

Peter visits some of the Christian communities—Comes to Lydda, and cures Æneas—Is sent for to Joppa—Raises Tabitha from the dead—Peter's vision at Joppa—His thoughts about it—The messengers from Cæsarea—Their errand—The vision of Cornelius—Peter goes with the messengers—The house of Cornelius—The assembly there—Peter's discourse—Its character and result—The outpouring of the Spirit on the Gentiles—Their baptism—Importance of this narrative to us.

"There was a certain man in Cæsarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; and when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa. On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: and he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, and saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, and called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And the morrow after they entered into Cæsarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends."—*Acts* x. 1—24.

Compare *Acts* x. 25—48.

THE WALL OF PARTITION BROKEN DOWN.

DURING the short season of tranquillity which the Christian community enjoyed after the conversion of Saul, Peter availed himself of the opportunity of visiting several of the churches which had been formed and organized beyond the limits of Jerusalem. In the course of his journey he came to the town of Lydda, where he performed a miracle in curing a man named Æneas, who had been bedridden for eight years. All hope of recovery had probably been given up by the man himself and his friends; but when the apostle of the Lord found him, and approached his couch with the thrilling words, "Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed," the paralytic at once arose, and, full of newly acquired vigour, performed the task. The effect of this miracle was great; for "all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord."* The man was well known, and few could resist the evidence which his miraculous cure afforded of the truth of the gospel.

While Peter was staying at this town a calamity overtook the church at Joppa, which induced the disciples there at once to send for the apostle.† The

* Acts ix. 32—35.

† Acts ix. 36—43.

distance between the places was only six or seven miles. A wealthy lady of that church, and one of its most useful members, named Tabitha, had died in the very midst of her usefulness. She was "full of good works and almsdeeds that she did;" and *Dorcas*, the Greek interpretation of her name, has given rise to societies in some modern Christian churches, for accomplishing objects like that for which she lived. The loss of such a disciple could not fail to be severely felt; and it is in all cases blessed and beautiful when God's people so live, that their death is regarded as a calamity and a loss. In their affliction Peter was sent for, although it is difficult to determine for what precise object or with what view. It would hardly be to raise the dead, for no apostle had yet done that. But whatever was their purpose or hope, Peter at once responded to the application, and proceeded to Joppa with the messengers. On his arrival he was taken to the upper chamber in which the body of the deceased Dorcas lay. The widows whom she had helped and blessed came around him, weeping. He gently put them out of the room, then knelt down and prayed, and arose assured that his prayer was heard. With this faith he turned to the corpse, and said, "Tabitha, arise." She immediately opened her eyes, and on seeing Peter, sat up. He gave her his hand to help her to her feet, and then, calling in the saints and widows, he presented alive to them the friend whose decease they had deeply mourned. A miracle like this could not fail to make a wide and deep impression on the people; and as a result we read that "many believed in the Lord."

It was while remaining at Joppa, in the house of

"one Simon a tanner," that the message came to Peter which issued in circumstances whose influence has come down in glorious privilege to us. Through that message and its results we Gentiles have the gospel preached to us. "A new mine was now about to be opened whence were to come stores of wealth for the kingdom of heaven; but it shocked all the natural and educational prejudices of the Jew to remove the sod and sink the shaft." This event, one of the most important in the history of the world, merits careful and serious consideration. Its issues have been momentous.

There was a new thing in the earth. An assembly of Gentiles had met to hear a message from God—Heaven's message of mercy and salvation from the mouth of a Jew. How was this? Cornelius, a Roman centurion of the Italian band, an officer and, as we should say, a gentleman, had so far profited by contact with the Jewish people as to become convinced that theirs was the true faith, and their God the true God. He was on duty at Cæsarea, and was manifestly of an earnest and reflective turn of mind.* There is no evidence that in the literal or technical sense he was a proselyte; but, on the contrary, the strongest evidence that he was still a Gentile. From the impression produced on his mind by Jewish worship and religion, he had abandoned idolatry, and having become persuaded of the sole sovereignty and supre-

* This town—carefully to be distinguished from Cæsarea Philippi—was situated on the coast of Palestine, on the great line of road from Tyre to Egypt. It was built by Herod the Great, who lavished vast expense in its erection, and named it in honour of the Emperor Augustus.

macy of Jehovah, he was seeking to know and fear him as the only true God. He was "a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway."* He had some true religious light, and evidently desired to follow it as far as he could. Hence more was to be given him. What he had was not enough either for spiritual peace or safety; but his devout desire to follow what he knew was pleasing to God, and obtained his blessing. Accordingly, during a period of fasting and prayer, in which, doubtless, the burden of his supplication was for more light, that he might be guided into all the truth needful for his soul, an angel of God appeared to him in a vision, and told him what to do. Thus we see that prayer, humble, earnest prayer for more of heavenly illumination, by the man who strives to walk in the light which he enjoys, is never in vain. Cornelius was told that his alms were remembered and that his prayers were heard, and that he should send to Joppa for the apostle Peter, who would "tell him what he ought to do." We might be tempted to suppose that it would have been a saving both of time and trouble, if the angel himself had told him what he required to know; but the heavenly messenger had no commission to preach the gospel. This ministry has not been given to angels. The treasure is put into "earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God," and that the glory may be clearly his alone.† On this authority, and with a soul filled with holy anxiety, Cornelius at once acted. He called two of his household servants,

* Acts x. 2.

† 2 Cor. iv. 7.

and sent them, along with a devout soldier, to Joppa, for Peter.

Meanwhile, during their absence, which could not be less than two days—for the distance between Joppa and Cæsarea was upwards of thirty miles—Cornelius made preparations for the reception of the apostle and his message. The members of his own household, his servants, dependents, “kinsmen, and friends,” were summoned together, all of whom were Gentiles. How many they numbered we are not informed; but they are doubtless to be regarded as the representatives of the whole Gentile world. This fact supplies us with a beautiful illustration of the salutary influence of a good and devout man. The convictions which he had himself reached regarding the religion of his fathers he had led others, to some extent at least, to cherish; and the gradual change which they had seen in him had its influence on them, so that not a few were prepared along with him to hear the gospel of Christ. They were a company of the uncircumcised, of those who were looked upon by the Jews as dogs and aliens. Cornelius by Divine authority had sent for the apostle, and had thus assembled his friends to meet him. Will the apostle go in obedience to such a call, from such a quarter? Yes, he went; for he, too, had seen a vision.

But before we see and hear Peter in the house of Cornelius it is necessary to consider how he was induced to go thither. Cornelius had been referred to Peter; and Peter, at the same time, was referred to Cornelius, by the special intimation of God himself. During his stay at Joppa the apostle took up his abode with “one Simon a tanner,” whose house was

by the sea-side, probably a little out of the town. One day, while there, he withdrew for private devotion to the housetop, at the noontide hour of prayer. In the course of this sacred exercise "he became very hungry, and would have eaten;" but the mid-day meal was not yet ready. "While they made ready he fell into a trance," in which, in mental vision, he beheld a great sheet of open work, probably like a net, let down by the four corners from heaven. He perceived that it contained all kinds of living creatures—animals wild and tame, birds, quadrupeds, and reptiles—creatures clean and unclean. He then heard a voice saying to him, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat." The vision was adapted to his physical condition; but, hungry as he was, he could not obey the invitation even in his trance. With the prompt readiness of one whose mind was well acquainted with the requirements of the ceremonial law the apostle objected, saying, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." He felt a strong repugnance to eat that which the law of Moses had pronounced unclean. But the voice replied to him, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." This was repeated three times, to impress it the more strongly upon Peter's mind, and to confirm, in the most decisive manner, the certainty of the truth thus symbolically and significantly conveyed.*

It was natural that the apostle, as soon as he was restored to his ordinary state, should proceed to reflect on the meaning of this vision. He doubted in himself, or debated with himself, what could be its purpose and meaning. Probably he thought it might indicate

* Acts x. 9—18.

that now, under the dispensation of Christ, every distinction of meats was to be abolished, and that the peculiarities of the ceremonial law were no longer to be binding. Or perhaps he conjectured that a deeper meaning than this was concealed under it ; that it was intended to show that the Gentiles were to be no longer regarded as impure, nor their society to be any longer shunned, and that the gospel of Christ was henceforth to be freely preached to them. But whatever may have been his thoughts, his difficulty on the matter was soon solved, and he speedily learned that this vision had been sent to him, in order to determine and guide his conduct under circumstances which would otherwise have greatly perplexed him.

While he was considering the subject of the vision, three strangers, one of whom was a Roman soldier, appeared at the tanner's gate, and asked for Peter. The Holy Spirit told the apostle that three men sought him, and desired him to "go with them, doubting nothing," because they had been Divinely sent. Accordingly Peter at once went down to the messengers, told them that he was the person for whom they inquired, and asked what they wanted with him. They delivered their message, telling him who had sent them, and under what circumstances they had come. The same Spirit who had said to Peter, "Go with them," had also declared, "I have sent them." The apostle's course was therefore clear.

As the occasion was likely to be one of considerable importance, Peter took six of the disciples at Joppa along with him, and departed for Cæsarea next morning.* Thus Divinely led, and thus accompanied,

* Acts xi. 12.

he went to the house of Cornelius. Of all the apostles Peter was probably the fittest for this solemn and important business. He was a man at once of decided action and of strong prejudice; and action taken by him, in such a case, would tend to show how great and sufficient the authority must have been that could overcome or set aside his prejudice. The fact, moreover, of his appointment to this duty was a further fulfilment of the promise of his Lord, and a further realization of the position which had been assigned to him. Christianity was to be more than a merely perfected Judaism, and Peter was to be more than the founder of the church at Jerusalem. Once more he is to wield the keys of life and death, once more to do something towards the loosening of the Christian church for ever from the yoke which neither he nor his fathers had been able to bear; and now, wider far than ever mortal hand had up to that moment dared, is he to throw open the gates of God's temple of truth—even to the whole human race. Thus his own especial work would be fulfilled.

When Cornelius and Peter met, the centurion fell down at his feet, in token of the profoundest reverence for him as an ambassador of God. The word rendered "worshipped" does not necessarily imply religious homage, but the regard due to one in high position. Peter felt he did not deserve any such homage, declaring that he was only a man. Then the two men related to one another the Divine communications which they had respectively received. During the conversation Peter put together the two revelations, and drew from them the conviction that the vision which appeared to him had a reference to the

Gentiles. He was therefore at once induced, under guidance of the Holy Ghost, to go with Cornelius into the house, where he found the company assembled. They were waiting to hear from Peter what communications or revelations the living God had given to him for their instruction. The apostle had been furnished with a sufficient ground and introduction for his preaching the gospel to the Gentiles; and he began by expressing the conviction, which he had been slow to realize, and which it had required a special communication from heaven to impress upon him, that the Gentiles were no longer to be regarded as unclean, but that the gospel and all its blessings were for them as well as for the Jews.

The discourse preached by him on this occasion may be divided into two parts—the explanation of his own convictions, and his statement of the gospel of salvation. He acknowledged that he saw now that God was no respecter of persons. The Jews had come to suppose that their position entitled them to the favour of God. This was their national idea, universal and strong in its influence. Peter had now learned the error of this belief, and was convinced that man is neither accepted because he is a Jew nor rejected because he is a Gentile. A man uncircumcised may have as true and spiritual a relationship to God as a man circumcised according to the law of Moses. Hence follows the natural equality of men before God.* No man from mere position or outward privilege has any advantage over another. In every nation, and under every dispensation, it is character that God regards and accepts. Piety towards him in

* Rom. ii.

the Gentile, as well as in the Jew, will meet with his approbation and favour. Peter came to see that the very distinction which God himself, for wise and gracious purposes, had made between his ancient people and the Gentiles, was to be no longer regarded. That distinction had so far answered its end; and now the fear of God everywhere was to be the only true distinction. The way by which that fear was to come, and the righteousness associated with it, were henceforth to be open to all men. None were to be unclean, and none excluded.

Having thus explained the lesson which he had been taught, he proceeded to preach the gospel to these Gentiles, and to preach it as fully and as freely to them as he had previously done to the Jews. He stated, first, the nature of the gospel, showing that its whole power and glory in relation to man depend upon the person, work, and offices of Jesus Christ, of whom these Gentiles must have often heard. Peter proclaimed the Messiahship, the wondrous life, the sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection of Jesus, and declared him to be Lord and Saviour and Judge of men. In this way he proved the gospel to be simply the truth about Jesus Christ, and supplied another instance to show that apostolic preaching was always the holding forth of the glory and work of Emmanuel. Peter further stated the design of the gospel to be for the remission and the removal of sin. The great object of Christ's mediation and sacrifice is, that the guilt of sin may be taken away, and its power destroyed. Thus pardon is free, and purity is obtained through the sorrow and suffering of the man Christ Jesus. This rich provision of mercy is for

Gentile as well as for Jew, inasmuch as all are sinners and all need to be forgiven. Jesus, who is in himself the gospel, is "Lord of all," and Ruler alike of Jews and Gentiles. His mercies are therefore offered to all, and his claims must be responded to and acknowledged by all. The universality of the gospel is coincident with the universal dominion of the Saviour, in opposition to any exclusive reference to one people or another. If Jesus is the universal Lord, his message of salvation cannot be confined to any single people or nation; it is truth, light, liberty, and peace for all.

The apostle finally declared the issue of the gospel dispensation, and of all present privileges arising from it, in the certainty of a universal judgment, when Christ will be the Judge, and all the living and all the dead shall alike be judged. Then will be seen and known how men have regarded the claims of Christ. Jew and Gentile will have to stand before that tribunal, and have their eternal award decided by that Judge who is now the Saviour and Lord of all.

While Peter was speaking "the Holy Ghost fell on all" who heard him, upon Cornelius and his friends, and that, too, in a manner distinctly perceptible to the senses. Some of the miraculous manifestations, which had been witnessed on the day of Pentecost, followed this new outpouring of the Spirit. The Gentiles spoke with tongues and glorified God, even before they were baptized. The whole case excited the astonishment of the Jews who had come with Peter. Yet in the facts which they saw and heard they recognised a principle, and perceived that the communication of the Spirit to the Gentiles was, in truth, the practical equalization of them and the seed of Abraham on the

part of God and before him. Then the wall of partition was actually broken down, and the lofty exclusiveness of Judaism was annihilated. Those nations and communities of men, who had been regarded as barbarians and dogs, were henceforth to be on an equality with the seed of Israel in relation to all the blessings of the gospel. Peter at once perceived and read this clear intimation of the Divine will in the facts before him, and he willingly and joyfully obeyed it. The others might give way to astonishment, but he immediately gave himself to duty. Accordingly he ordered all those who had thus received the Holy Spirit to be baptized with water in the name of the Lord—"Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized?"—thus appealing to his companions lest their prejudice should not yet have been quite overcome, and hinting that it was surely not for man to withhold the baptism of water where God had so signally vouchsafed the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Thus Gentiles were for the first time enrolled as members of the church of the living God; and Peter, in afterwards relating the circumstances of the case, and defending himself against the attack of those Jewish Christians who found fault with him for what he had done, declared that the command of God was so clear, and the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles so manifest, that to refuse them the tokens of Christian discipleship and brotherhood would have been to "withstand God."*

It is impossible for us to enter fully into all the momentousness of this portion of the apostolical history, either as it regarded the Jews or the Gentiles.

* Acts xi. 17.

What an upsetting of prejudice in the one case ; what an introduction to new thought and life and glory in the other ! Then it was proved that in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. The influence of this event has come down to us, and the promises and blessings of God are with us in the gospel of his Son, because the wall of partition was thus broken down.

The whole narrative is suggestive of much important truth. We see from it that the true way of increased light and blessing is to use aright what we have. So it was in the experience of Cornelius ; and his case illustrates a principle. "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance." "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord."* Do not wonder that you are unhappy, ignorant, and wretched, if the light that is in you be as darkness ; a light unimproved, unfollowed, and unobeyed. This is but the working of law in God's moral government.

We see further the glorious grace of God in the gospel of his Son. He cares for all his children and for all his creatures. His provision of mercy is alike for all ; an infinite treasury of blessing, equal to the necessities of the whole of the fallen race.

And we discover also the wondrous adaptation of the gospel. It is fitted to purify every heart, to bring light and life to every soul of man. The educated and the uneducated, the rich and the poor, the refined and the barbarian, find here a power which descends to the lowest depths of their nature, touches the springs of their being, and fills them with thought,

* Matt. xiii. 12 ; Hos. vi. 3.

emotion, and hope, which are equally new and glorious. As all absolutely need, so all should earnestly and resolutely seek the salvation of God. The gospel is not less precious now than when it was first preached, nor are the necessities of the soul less pressing. The treasury of blessing and boundless spiritual wealth for Jew and Gentile alike, is in Christ the Lord, still open, available, and free to all.



CHAPTER XIII.

PETER'S RELEASE FROM PRISON.

Persecution no real barrier to truth—Herod's character and influence—The martyrdom of James—Testimony of Eusebius—Apprehension of Peter—Remanded till after Passover—His prison—Guard—The anxiety of the church—Prayer by the church for Peter—What was asked—Value and power of prayer—Deliverance at the eleventh hour—Peter's calm sleep in prison—Aroused by an angel—Told to get up and go out—Accompanied by the angel to the street—Peter goes to the house of Mary—Disciples praying there—Rhoda—Joy at Peter's release—Consternation of the authorities at Peter's escape—Herod orders the soldiers to be slain—His own awful death—God's care of his church.

“Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.”—*Acts* xii. 1—17.

PETER'S RELEASE FROM PRISON.

THE spirit in human nature which had instigated the crucifixion of Jesus still prevailed. Now it began to wax hot and fierce against his disciples and church. The hostility and hatred of the Jews became more intense, and all means were tried to stop the progress and crush the power of Christianity. Persecution seemed to be the readiest and most effective mode of accomplishing this end, and accordingly it was freely used. It is strange how men have been so slow to learn that persecution is virtually useless as a barrier to the progress of opinion or of faith. Indeed, so contrary to this has been its influence, both directly and indirectly, that the blood of the martyrs has proved to be "the seed of the church." In nothing, perhaps, have the devil and his servants more signally or significantly outwitted themselves than in the persecution of the church.

After the conversion of Saul, and when the Jews came to see that the new religion of the Christians extended its benevolence and favour to Gentiles as well as to Jews, their animosity grew more bitter and their zeal against it still more fierce. Herod was a fitting person to please them, in embodying and carrying out their feelings against the disciples of

Christ. He was the third of that name mentioned in Scripture, all of whom appear to have possessed similar dispositions. The first was Herod the Great, who sought to take away the life of the infant Saviour, and who, to accomplish this design, murdered the children in Bethlehem; an act of reckless wickedness and cruelty which sufficiently indicates his character. The second was his son, known as Herod Antipas, through whose rash oath John the Baptist was beheaded, and who on the day of the Saviour's passion brutally and coarsely set him at nought, and mocked him in the presence of his men of war. The third was Herod Agrippa, who had been brought up in Rome at the court of the Emperor Tiberius, and who, making it his object to secure the good-will of the Jews, began to vex and persecute the disciples of Jesus. One of the leading principles of this monarch's life seems to have been, to make himself agreeable to all persons whose favour might be of any use to him. It was now his interest to stand well with the Jews; and he knew that nothing would be more conducive to this end than to affect great zeal for the Mosaic ritual, and to persecute the Christians. He selected James as the first victim of his malignant cruelty: why he did so we are not told. This apostle was slain with the sword. He was the first martyr among the apostles; and thus early to him, as one of the sons of Zebedee, was the prediction fulfilled, that they should drink of the same cup with their Lord, and be baptized with the same baptism.* It may seem surprising that the first death in "the holy company" of the apostles

* Mark x. 35—39.

should be dismissed with the few words which simply announce the fact; but even in this comparative silence there may be seen glimpses of a hidden glory. Thus it is shown that Christ's cause and church on the earth did not depend on the apostleship of any man, but on the living Lord himself.

Eusebius, the ecclesiastical historian, reports an interesting incident connected with the martyrdom of James. The officer who had the apostle in charge during his trial, and who may have also been his accuser, was so convinced and impressed by James's demeanour before the judgment seat, that he confessed Christ, and was led out with him to execution. On the way he besought pardon of the apostle, who, after maintaining silence for a little, said, "Peace be with thee," and kissed him.*

But the persecution of the church did not end with the martyrdom of James. When Herod saw that this act of cruelty "pleased the Jews," he apprehended Peter also, with the intention of bringing him forth after the feast of the Passover, then to pass the sentence of death upon him. The king seemed to hold as sacred the rule of the Jewish tradition which prevented any criminal from being brought to trial during any of the great festivals; so that he would not condemn Peter to death till after the Passover; for so the word rendered *Easter* should have been translated. If the Jews were to be gratified, and the growing power of Christ's religion checked, nothing could have been more calculated to secure these ends, it was thought, than the apprehension of Peter, and his removal from the scene of active service. He was

* Euseb. Eccles. Hist. bk. ii. ch. 9.

probably the most conspicuous of the disciples of the crucified Nazarene; one of the most active, influential, and prominent of this new sect. To touch him, therefore, as Herod doubtless supposed, would be to touch the whole cause of Christianity. Hence he was seized and lodged in prison, perhaps the same prison in which he had formerly been confined. And the remembrance of his former deliverance doubtless induced the authorities to take extraordinary care in making sure of him on this occasion. Accordingly he was consigned to the custody of "four quaternions of soldiers," and bound with two chains. A quaternion was a picket of four soldiers, and four of these, making sixteen men, were all appointed to guard one prisoner and prevent his escape. It was not usual to chain a prisoner to more than one soldier; but in the case of the apostle Peter, at this time, two were employed, one on either side; so that it is difficult to see how he could be more completely secured than he was. Shut up in a strong prison, guarded by sentinels, with his person so attached to living men that his slightest movement could not fail to be heard and felt, how could he escape? But the walls were never built, the chains never made, the guards never born, that could hold in bondage him whom God willed to be free. Yet how trying for the church was it thus to be deprived of their apostolic counsellor, and leader, and most important earthly friend. In such circumstances what could they do? They knew well both what to do, and where to go.

It was quite natural that the church should be thrown into anxiety and distress as soon as they

heard that Peter had been cast into prison by the very man who had so recently murdered James. But if the apostle was now beyond the reach of their direct personal help and sympathy, they knew that the Master whom he served could both help him and comfort them in this time of their great trial. Accordingly we read that "prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him."* They were prompted to this exercise by their sense of Peter's usefulness, of their own helplessness, and of Christ's power and glory. The apostle's life was a precious life, both in its connexion with themselves and in connexion with Christ's kingdom on earth; and as James had been cut off it was the more important that Peter should be spared. Hence on personal as well as public grounds they gave themselves to prayer in his behalf. The object of their supplication was doubtless, in the first place, the life of the apostle, that he might be rescued and spared. We are not, indeed, expressly told so, but the narrative evidently leads us to suppose that his deliverance was in answer to prayer, and we reasonably conclude that they prayed for that deliverance.

But of what use, it might be asked, could prayer be in such a case as this? What good could it do to Peter, thus imprisoned, guarded, chained, and reserved for death by a tyrant, not likely to be moved from his purpose? Deliverance seemed even a physical impossibility. Yet the disciples, knowing all this, did not act upon the flippant philosophy of some men, who would say, "It is of no use to pray: prayer cannot break down stone walls, nor can it bribe sentinels."

* Acts xii. 5.

They prayed all the more earnestly, believing that nothing was impossible with God. They could not but remember that Daniel was preserved in the den of lions; that the three Hebrew youths were preserved in the midst of a burning fiery furnace;* and they believed that the God who had wrought these deliverances both heard and could answer their prayers.

But we do not suppose that these Christian disciples prayed only for the apostle's deliverance: they doubtless also prayed for his Divine support and consolation, that in the trial which was upon him, and the prospect which was before him, he might be upheld and sustained by the presence, sympathy, and grace of Christ; that, if he was not delivered, if like James he was to be called upon to seal his testimony with his blood, he might be able to "witness a good confession" before the tribunal of Herod, and have an abundant entrance into the heavenly kingdom of his glorious Lord.

Their supplication on his behalf was fervent, earnest, and persevering. They prayed "without ceasing;" or, as in the marginal reading, instant and earnest prayer was made for him. How trying to their faith the circumstances were! Day after day, during the sacred feast of the Passover, they prayed, and Peter still lay in prison. And now it was the last night, within a few hours of the time when Herod would feel at liberty to bring the apostle forth for sentence and execution. Doubtless the Lord's hand was in the postponement of Herod's unhallowed purpose, in order that the church might thus have the opportunity for

* Dan. iii. and vi.

fervent prayer in his behalf. By continued asking, the fervency of desire is evinced and the sense of dependence acknowledged. When the church thus prayed, the blessing was not far off. To Peter, imprisoned, the consciousness that the disciples were praying for him could not fail to be a source of consolation and hope. So it is in every case where the earnest labourer, or the wearied but willing servant of the Lord, knows that he is borne on the spirits of God's people at the throne of grace. It is often a help, a solace, and a joy, amid weakness and much discouragement. And when in any case opportunity for prayer is given, and many are excited to join in it as with one heart and soul, it may be regarded as some indication that God intends to grant their request. It was so in this remarkable instance.

The Passover week was almost ended, and the church felt that in a few hours their apostle might be taken from them, as St. James had been. The fierce and bitter Jews, on the other hand, felt that their victim would soon be brought forth to execution. But man proposes, and God disposes. Deliverance was effected the very night before the morning that Peter was to be led forth to condemnation and death. Yet the prospect before him troubled not the apostle. He does not appear to have felt either anxiety or fear. He lay that night between the soldiers to whom he was chained, enjoying the sleep which is given to a calm and trusting soul. To die in his Lord's cause was not a doom to excite either dismay or anxiety in his mind. At a time of his life when far less enlightened, Peter had said that he was willing to lay down his life for his Master's

sake ; and now that he knew and felt so much more of the truth, the prospect of even such a sacrifice as this did not move him. Perhaps, however, he cherished the conviction, from what the Lord had said to him personally after his resurrection, that there would be some Divine interposition in his behalf. The words which Jesus then addressed to him intimated, that when he was old he would be carried whither he would not, referring to the death by which he was to die ;* so that he may have now thought the end of his earthly life was not yet at hand. Nevertheless it was an equal trial of faith in his circumstances, seeing that even if he trusted that deliverance would come, everything seemed to point the other way. On a former occasion he had been delivered ; and why not now ? This deliverance was nigh.

As Peter lay asleep between the soldiers, a messenger from heaven entered the prison and filled it with the light of his presence. Neither bolts nor bars, neither walls nor guards, could prevent the admission of such a visitor. A sudden accession of strong light usually rouses a man from sleep ; but the apostle's repose was too sound to be thus disturbed. The angel therefore smote him on the side to awake him. Upon this he awoke, and before he could recover from his surprise and collect his thoughts, or even see distinctly, the angel commanded him to "rise up quickly." Immediately as the words were spoken the chains fell from his hands. Then he was instructed to gird himself and put on his sandals, to cast his garment about him, and follow the angel who had aroused and addressed him. There is beautiful sig-

* John xxi. 18, 19.

nificance in all this : there was no hurry, no confusion, in the escape.* Under ordinary circumstances the fugitive in such a case cares little for his attire ; but here nothing was left to haste or chance, that God's supremacy and power might be clearly seen in the deliverance. Thus all the forces which Herod had put forth to secure the person of Peter vanished in a moment, as utterly futile and powerless. So sudden, extraordinary, and exciting were the circumstances, that the apostle at first did not know whether the whole proceeding was not a vision. Nevertheless he followed the angel, in obedience to his command : they passed the first ward, and then the second, without being perceived ; and when they came to the outermost iron gate, which was the only barrier now between Peter and liberty, it flew open of its own accord, and the angel and the apostle walked forth into the street. Here the heavenly messenger left him, and Peter had to proceed alone.

He now perceived that his deliverance was real, and was unquestionably from God. But though set at liberty, what was he to do ? After a little consideration he soon determined. It is worthy of abiding remembrance that God does not do for us what we can do for ourselves. The angel did not lead Peter through the streets of Jerusalem, even although it was amidst the darkness of night that he brought him out. He did the work which the apostle could not do, in securing

* We may observe the same orderly calmness, the same absence of hurry or confusion, in the circumstances of our Lord's coming forth from his sepulchral prison, when "the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone." "The napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself" (Matt. xxviii. 2 ; John xx. 7).

his deliverance out of the prison ; but when he brought him fairly forth to liberty he left him to his own reflection and discretion. Many mistake, and come short of blessing and success, because they expect God to do for them that which he requires them to do for themselves. Peter, now free, thought and acted on this occasion for himself. He sought first the dwelling of a Christian friend, the house of a Christian lady, Mary, the mother of John Mark.* In that house there were many disciples gathered together, praying, late as the hour was, and their prayers doubtless had special reference to the apostle. He was to die the next day ; at least, so they supposed and feared ; and while he was asleep many had remained awake in prayer to God on his behalf. The case of the apostle became to them more and more hopeless as the last hour of possible deliverance drew nigh ; yet they abated neither the fervour nor the earnestness of prayer. Such prayer God ever honours, because it honours him. On arriving at the house Peter knocked at the door, and a girl named Rhoda came to ask who was there. When she heard that it was Peter, and recognised his voice, instead of opening the gate, she rushed into the house to tell the joyful news that the apostle was free, and was standing without at the door. They did not believe it, although it was the very thing that they were praying for. They told the girl that she was mad ; and when she still insisted that Peter was without, they concluded it must be his guardian angel, who had taken the form and voice of Peter, in order to comfort them, and prepare them for the issue, perhaps for the worst.

* Acts xii. 12.

Meanwhile, during this doubting and debate, Peter, still standing outside, was becoming impatient, and resumed his knocking. When they opened the door, and saw that it was really the apostle himself, and neither angel nor spirit, their astonishment and joy were great. To prevent the noise and tumult of their gladness, Peter beckoned to them to be quiet, that they might listen in silence to what God had done for him. He then told them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison, and, instead of waiting himself to tell the church generally of his deliverance, he requested those who were in Mary's house to report the fact and its details to the surviving James, who presided over the church at Jerusalem,* and to the brethren at large. Although it was night, he then departed, and went into another place, for safety and for further usefulness. In this he obeyed his Lord's command, who enjoined his disciples when they were persecuted in one city to flee to another;† so that Peter did not presume upon his deliverance, to consider himself safe, or bound to expose himself to danger from renewed attempts upon his life; but prudently and properly retired. We might perhaps have expected that the apostle would rest awhile in the house of Mary, in order to arouse the whole assembly to one common feeling of gratitude and joy. But no: even the company in that house had hardly recovered from its first impression of surprise, when Peter was in haste to be gone. Had he remained in Jerusalem he would scarcely have

* See Acts xv. 13; xxi. 18; Gal. ii. 12. This was James the Less, or Younger, called the Lord's brother (Gal. i. 19).

† Matt. x. 23.

asked them to tell James and the church of his deliverance, inasmuch as he would have had some opportunity of seeing them himself. He removed from the city, not, however, from considerations of personal safety only, but, now more than ever convinced of the extent of his apostolic commission, that he might go forth, and preach the gospel in other regions. His persecution and deliverance were to him a sign that his Master had work for him to do elsewhere. Thus it is always well to watch the indications of providence, and to see God's will in them, pointing out to us the path of duty.

As might have been expected, there was great consternation in the prison and amongst the soldiers, next day, when it was found that the prisoner was gone. They were at a loss to know how he could have escaped. Herod was furious when he heard that, notwithstanding all his precautions, the apostle had disappeared. He caused a diligent search to be made for him; and when no trace could anywhere be found, he examined the soldiers, and, finding that they could give him no information, he cruelly commanded that they should be put to death.

Nor was this unhappy monarch himself long left upon the earth thus to exercise his tyranny. The cup of his iniquity and cruelty was nearly full. Upon a set day of public games, appointed by Herod himself, at Cæsarea, in honour of the Roman emperor, the king sat upon his throne to deliver an oration in the hearing of the ambassadors from Tyre and Sidon. Josephus informs us that Herod's royal attire was wholly of silver tissue, which shone most effulgently in the morning sun, and whose dazzling brilliance astonished

those who beheld him.* When he gave his speech the people raised a shout, and hailed him as a god. As a Jew he ought to have repelled this homage with horror and indignation. But in the spirit of a vain ambition he accepted it ; and as God is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another, an angel immediately smote Herod, so that he died an excruciating and a loathsome death. According to Josephus, he lingered for five days in extreme torture, and was at length eaten of worms.

The disciples of Jesus had for themselves no cause to bewail his death. One of their most cruel and determined foes was thus removed ; and after his decease we are told that the "word of God grew and multiplied." Thus his cruel life and shameful end eventually tended to the manifest progress of the gospel, and the widening triumphs of the word of God.

We learn from this narrative, God's constant and paternal care of his church and servants. The great King walks amongst the golden candlesticks, and holds the stars in his right hand. No weapon formed against the church can prosper. God can make the wrath of man to praise him, and the remainder of it he can restrain. Herod's enmity to the Christian church was powerless against God's protection. Thus it is ever true that those whom Jehovah has in his holy keeping are secure amidst all danger.

We see also here the resource and power of prayer. No instance of this is perhaps more significant in the whole history of the church. Yet how many both before and since have found deliverance and help

* "Antiquities of the Jews," bk. xix. ch. viii. sect. 2.

through prayer. When days are dark and friends are few, what resource is equal to this? Prayer lays hold of the arm which moves the universe: it is the communion of the soul with that Supreme Being who is ever at rest amidst all commotion. Blessed are they who know the value of prayer, who have tested for themselves its sacred and mighty power.

The result of Peter's deliverance shows that God can make the counsels and conduct of his enemies to work out his own gracious purposes. The cruelty of Herod and the hostility of the Jews turned out to the furtherance of the gospel. The word of the Lord grew and multiplied. The apostles thus persecuted rose to higher usefulness and more extensive victory, in their glorious mission as heralds of the cross. Thus the greatest bitterness and malignity of man may be made to promote the purposes of God, in the enlargement of his kingdom and the promotion of his glory.



CHAPTER XIV.

THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM.

Where did Peter go after his deliverance?—No grounds for the opinion that he went to Rome—His next appearance at Jerusalem—The occasion of the assembly there—St. Paul the apostle of the uncircumcision—Converts at Antioch—Question as to the necessity of circumcision—Assembly summoned at Jerusalem—Of whom composed—James the president—Peter's address—Its substance and its effect—Supplies an illustration of God's plan for spreading the gospel—Asserts God's sovereignty in the choice of his servants—Proves God's impartiality in the adaptation and application of the gospel—Shows the true effect of the gospel—Power of God in the efficacy of the gospel—Rejection of all trust in outward rites—Salvation entirely of grace.

“And certain men which came down from Judæa taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.”—*Acts* xv. 1—12.

THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM.

SEVERAL years must have elapsed between Peter's deliverance and escape, and his next appearance in the records of the apostolic history. Whither he went on leaving Jerusalem we are not informed. Romish commentators allege that Rome was the un-named locality to which the apostle betook himself; but there is not the slightest foundation for such an opinion. It seems beyond a doubt that Peter had not visited Rome previous to the writing of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: otherwise there would have been some reference to him and his labours, or some message concerning him, in that Epistle, the date of which must have been at least ten or twelve years after Peter's departure from Jerusalem. Moreover, in the various letters which Paul wrote to and from Rome* there is no allusion whatever to Peter's having been there; a thing unaccountable on the assumption that he had preached the gospel in that city, and founded the church there.† Perhaps, for a short time,

* These were the Epistles to the Ephesians, to the Colossians, to Philemon, all written A.D. 62; also the Epistles to the Philippians, A.D. 63; the 2nd Epistle to Timothy, A.D. 65 or 66; and the Epistle to the Hebrews, assuming St. Paul to have been the author of the last.

† See the question of Peter's being at Rome more fully discussed in the Appendix.

the apostle remained in concealment, until the excitement regarding his escape from prison should subside; but we may be quite sure that with such a commission as he had received, and with such a work before him, he would not be long silent. To him was committed the "gospel of the circumcision;"* and his labours were mainly among his own countrymen, who were scattered, as strangers, throughout the provinces of Asia Minor.

We next read of him as present on the memorable occasion of the council or assembly at Jerusalem, met to settle a question which had for some time been agitating the church. The part which Peter took in the discussions of that assembly was an important one; but to understand it aright we must briefly refer to the origin and nature of the controversy.

St. Paul had begun to appear before the church in his true character, as the apostle of the uncircumcision. Antioch seems to have been one of the first places, and perhaps the most important, where the gospel found its way largely among the Gentiles. In that city the Greek proselytes first accepted the truth; and there the united body of believers were first called Christians.† There, too, Barnabas and Paul, for "a whole year, assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people." Such triumphs of the truth were not looked upon favourably by many of the Jewish Christians, because they saw that in the progress of the gospel their own Judaism was likely to be absorbed and lost. Hence they aroused themselves to resist the unqualified and unconditional

* Gal. ii. 7.

† Acts xi. 26.

admission of the Gentiles to the church, and to insist on the necessity of circumcision. Some of these Judaizers, or "false brethren," as St. Paul calls them,* having heard what had been going on at Antioch, went down from Judea to that city, that they might ascertain, if possible, how far the Mosaic ritual had been relaxed or abandoned by the Christians there. It was their design and desire, without perhaps, in the first instance, openly opposing Paul, to bring the whole church under the bondage of the Jewish law, by insisting on it as necessary to salvation. They did not merely recommend the observance of the Jewish ceremonial as a matter of expediency or prudence, but boldly said, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." The apostle Paul, though always ready to show charity in matters that were indifferent, felt that such a doctrine as this tended to tarnish the true glory, and defeat the Divine purpose of the gospel. Hence he opposed it with his whole heart and soul. But the discussion and disputation, between Paul and Barnabas on the one side, and the false teachers on the other, issued in a painful state of agitation and perplexity among the Christians at Antioch. It was therefore determined to refer the matter to the church at Jerusalem—the mother church, from which these "false brethren" had come out. Accordingly "Paul and Barnabas, and certain other" disciples, were appointed to go up "unto the apostles and elders about this question." It would appear that Titus, a Greek and uncircumcised, was of those who accompanied them to Jerusalem on this occasion.† We gather from the assurance that

* Gal. ii. 4.

† Gal. ii. 1—5.

they were "brought on their way by the church," that the majority of the disciples at Antioch were still faithful to the gospel of Christ.

On arriving at Jerusalem, Paul and his companions "were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders" there, and "declared all things that God had done with them." But though many, doubtless, expressed congratulation and thankfulness, yet with others the same spirit of opposition manifested itself in the mother church, and the same note of discord was struck, which had produced disturbance at Antioch. "There rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."* These men, though believing that Jesus was the Christ, had not yet surrendered their Jewish prejudice and bigotry: they were still resolutely opposed to the teaching and the practice of Paul on this matter. An important question had, therefore, to be settled; and "the apostles and elders, with the whole church,"† "came together for to consider of this matter." It was the question of liberty or bondage for all future ages, and for the churches of Christ everywhere; so that the assembly was one of momentous interest. It was not strictly a representative council, consisting of deputies from various churches; for representatives from Antioch only were present with the church at Jerusalem; and the fact that the decision arrived at is announced as being the decision of the Holy Ghost,‡ places it altogether out of the category of ordinary ecclesiastical councils.

It is not, however, with the proceedings of this

* Acts xv. 5.

† Acts xv. 22.

‡ Acts xv. 28.

assembly as a whole that we have here to do, but with the particular part which Peter took in it. It appears that James, who was the bishop or superintendent of the church at Jerusalem, was the president of the assembly ; so that there is no evidence here, but the contrary, for the alleged supremacy of Peter. Nevertheless it was just as natural, on the other hand, that, when the assembly was constituted with James for its president, Peter should be the first of the apostles to rise and address the multitude. He stated, in a simple and explicit manner, his own convictions on the subject of dispute, and gave his decision against the Judaizing teachers, and their attempt to enforce the observance of the Mosaic ritual. "He reminded his hearers of the part which he himself had taken in admitting the Gentiles into the Christian church. They were well aware, he said, that these recent converts in Syria and Cilicia were not the first heathens who had believed the gospel, and that he himself had been chosen by God to begin the work which St. Paul had only been continuing. The communication of the Holy Ghost was the true test of God's acceptance ; and God had shown that he was no respecter of persons, by shedding abroad the same miraculous gifts on Jew and Gentile, and purifying by faith the hearts of both alike. And then St. Peter went on to speak, in touching language, of the yoke of the Jewish law. Its weight had pressed heavily on many generations of Jews, as was well known to the Pharisees who were listening at that moment. They had been relieved from legal bondage by the salvation offered through faith ; and it would be tempting God to impose on others a burden which

neither they nor their fathers had ever been able to bear."*

Such, in substance, was the address of Peter; a noble vindication of the gospel of Christ, and of its perfect sufficiency for the salvation of men, whether Jews or Gentiles. He declared that God himself had really settled the matter in dispute, by sending him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, and bestowing on them the gift of the Holy Ghost. Fifteen years, at least, had elapsed since the conversion of Cornelius; and this length of time is placed by Peter in the strongest light, to show that the question had, in fact, been settled long before by Divine interposition. After he had concluded his address, "all the multitude kept silence." The assembly, which had been greatly agitated by conflicting opinions, was tranquillized by the apostle's words. He had pointed to a work which lay before their eyes, and had also appealed to an inward experience regarding the burdensomeness of the law, which their own consciences felt. Hence there can be no doubt that his statement produced a deep impression, and helped to the unanimity of the decision at which the assembly arrived. The obligation of circumcision was rejected, and the full liberty of the Gentile converts established and proclaimed.

There are various points in Peter's address which should never be forgotten by us, and which claim devout consideration.

1. The apostle's address asserts God's sovereignty in the choice of his servants for special work in the gospel. Peter declares that God made choice of him

* Conybeare and Howson's "Life and Epistles of St. Paul."

from among the other apostles, that by his mouth the Gentiles "should hear the word of the gospel, and believe." Men might have thought some other apostle more suitable for such a mission than the forward and impetuous Peter. They might have supposed the loving persuasiveness of John, or the gentle guilelessness of Bartholomew, or even the convinced incredulity of Thomas, more likely to reach the Gentiles successfully than the impulsiveness of Peter. "But wisdom is justified of her children;"* and Peter, selected and qualified by his Lord, was doubtless the fittest instrument for the work. The very strength of his prejudices, when once they were overcome, and the robust energy of his soul, gave him a measure of adaptation for the accomplishment of this mission to the Gentiles, which we can readily see. When the great Master has special work to do, he will find and fit the men to do it.

2. Peter's words also supply a proof of God's impartiality in the adaptation and application of the gospel. There is no respect of persons with him. In the provisions of the gospel, and in the offers of mercy, he has "put no difference between" the Jew and the Gentile. Through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and through that alone, shall both be saved. The gospel has a blessing which all alike need; and it is intended equally for all. In it "the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."† It is adapted to man as man, fallen, guilty, and sinful, without respect to national diversity or social distinction. Hence, as the angel said to the shepherds of

* Matt. xi. 19.

† Rom. x. 12, 13.

Bethlehem on the advent of the Saviour, it is "good tidings of great joy" "to all people."*

3. In this address we have a statement of the true effect of the gospel, in its contact and connexion with man. It purifies the heart. If this is not accomplished nothing is really gained; for the heart, as representing here the seat of thought and affection, is the citadel of manhood. It is the heart that is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."† To purify the heart, therefore, is to purify the fountain of human character, and the source whence flow forth the issues of life. The truth, applied by the Spirit, is the wisdom and the power of God, for salvation from the power and penalty of sin, to every one that believeth. And its purifying influence is manifested through faith. In no other way, and by no other principle, can the gospel be brought into contact with the human heart. Faith apprehends a God "of purer eyes than to behold evil;"‡ it trusts a Saviour "undefiled, and separate from sinners;" it accepts a gospel of purity; it welcomes the Spirit of holiness; and it anticipates a home above, into which there cannot "enter anything that defileth."§ The gospel of God brings many blessings in its train to individuals, families, and nations; but it accomplishes its true mission, and secures its true victory, only when it purifies the heart.

4. Further, the apostle's words contain a distinct declaration of the power of God in this efficacy and influence of the gospel. It is not the gospel itself that purifies the heart, but God by the gospel. This

* Luke ii. 10.

† Hab. i. 13.

‡ Jer. xvii. 9.

§ Rev. xxi. 27.

is never to be overlooked. It is the work of the living, quickening Spirit of truth. The word is the sword of the Spirit ; but to reach its true effect it must be wielded and applied by himself, for the piercing of the heart and the destruction of sin. The truth is indeed living truth ; but for the quickening and purifying of souls that are dead and sinful, it must be lodged within by the power of the Holy Ghost.

5. There is here also a rejection and disavowal of all confidence in mere outward rites as necessary to salvation. Such a confidence is altogether opposed to the simplicity and sufficiency of the gospel. The imposition of the Mosaic law as a condition of salvation was an unbearable burden. So we may truly say now of any rite, sacrament, or outward ordinance. The Lord of the church in wisdom and love has given us ordinances to help our spiritual sense by outward symbols ; but it is a great and perilous mistake to depend on sacraments for salvation, or to insist on outward rites as the means of acceptance with God. It is Christ alone that is the foundation of the sinner's hope ; and sacraments are valuable only as they impress us with his truth, and help to bring us into closer fellowship with him. "In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision ; but faith which worketh by love."*

6. Finally, how full and distinct in Peter's address is the announcement, that salvation is entirely by grace. It is through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that we shall be saved ; so "it is of faith, that it might be by grace."† It was grace that

* Gal. v. 6.

† Rom. iv. 16.

brought the Saviour from the glory which he had before the world was, to this scene of sin and woe: it was in grace that he gave himself to the death of the cross, and made his soul an offering for sin: it is in grace that he now reigns on high to give eternal life to as many as believe in his name. The "unsearchable riches of Christ" are "the exceeding riches of grace;" and every soul of man enriched by them, and saved by this grace, is ready to sing,—

"Grace first contrived the way
To save rebellious man;
And all the steps that grace display,
Which drew the wondrous plan.

"Grace all the work shall crown
Through everlasting days;
It lays in heaven the topmost stone,
And well deserves the praise."



CHAPTER XV.

PETER'S DISSIMULATION AT ANTIOCH.

Peter and Paul—Their personal appearance—The occasion of their meeting at Antioch—Not factitious—Peter's fear—His attempted compromise—Unworthy of him—A practical and dangerous course—Paul "withstands him to the face"—Paul's position trying—His rebuke just, faithful, and public—Peter received it properly—Speaks of him afterwards as "our beloved brother Paul"—This narrative shows the truth of the gospel history—The importance of Christian consistency—The danger of any attempt at compromise in religion—The faithfulness of true friendship.

“And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do. But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; inso-much that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.”—*Gal.* ii. 9—19.

“And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you.”—*2 Pet.* iii. 15.

PETER'S DISSIMULATION AT ANTIOCH.

IN the portion of apostolic history which we have now to consider, Paul comes before us in connexion with Peter. The circumstances were no less remarkable than important, and from the incidents of the narrative we may try to imagine the scene. We naturally wish to picture to ourselves the appearance of the two men who were so prominent on this occasion. We may gather a general notion of their forms and features from the traditions which have been handed down, and from such representations of early artists as have been preserved. St. Paul is set before us as having the strongly marked and prominent features of a Jew, yet not without some of the finer lines indicative of Greek thoughtfulness. His stature was diminutive, his body probably slightly deformed, his beard long and thin, and his head bald. The characteristics of his face were a transparent complexion which visibly betrayed the quick changes of his feelings, a bright grey eye under thickly overhanging eyebrows, a cheerful and winning expression of countenance which invited the approach and inspired the confidence of strangers. His own words, on more than one occasion, show that he suffered a good deal from some bodily infirmity.

St. Peter is represented to us as a man of larger and stronger form, in keeping with his character, which was harsher and more abrupt. The quick impulses of his soul revealed themselves in the flashes of a dark eye. The complexion of his face was pale and sallow, and the short hair, which is described as entirely gray at the time of his death, curled black and thick round his temples and his chin when the two apostles stood together at Antioch, twenty years before their martyrdom.*

It is strange that this meeting of the apostles, or rather the circumstances connected with it, should be considered by some of the early fathers as being a preconcerted affair. The narrative is interpreted as if it recorded only a pretended conflict or mere show of difference between Peter and Paul. Both Origen and Chrysostom think that it was got up by agreement between the two apostles to serve a purpose in connexion with the early church. This idea was doubtless first cherished from a fear lest Peter's inspired authority should be brought into question; and as the notion of his supremacy and infallibility gained power, so of course did this interpretation meet with growing acceptance in Christendom. But it is utterly groundless. Such an interpretation would be far more damaging to the apostolic character than the literal fact as here presented, for it would make the apostles parties to a deception. All the circumstances of the case palpably refute this strange idea.

It is necessary to glance at the occasion of this meeting between the apostles. The decision of the

* *Vide* Conybeare and Howson's "Life and Epistles of St. Paul."

council at Jerusalem touching the question of circumcision was conveyed back to Antioch by Paul and Barnabas, along with some brethren from the mother church, and was most gratefully received. The Gentile Christians heartily rejoiced at having this vexed question settled, and the Jewish Christians appeared to acquiesce in the decision. Paul and Barnabas continued at Antioch, "teaching and preaching the word of God with great success."*

It was evidently during this residence of St. Paul in Antioch that the visit of Peter took place to this "metropolis of Gentile Christianity." He seems to have come in order to see and to help the work of God, with a desire to carry out the decree to which he had been an acting party at Jerusalem, and to give the sanction of his presence and labours to the efforts of Paul and Barnabas. He had no jealousy of Paul, no wish to interfere with his work, and no purpose but to encourage and confirm it. Accordingly at first he mingled freely with the Gentiles, ate with them in their social entertainments, as well as partook with them of the Lord's supper; and thus by his conduct acknowledged them as true children of God and true disciples of Christ. But soon a change came over him, and Paul had to meet him with honest, yet indignant rebuke.

Peter was not yet a perfect man; and although he had learned much in the painful, but profitable school of experience, yet his own temperament continued, and its weakness sometimes mastered him and his better principles. He was amongst the first to recognise great truths and principles, but he was some-

* Acts xv. 35.

times too ready to shrink from carrying them out. Yet even on any such occasion, when he recovered himself, no man would stand by these principles more faithfully, or would more bitterly regret that he should even for a moment have been faithless to them. What then did Peter do on this occasion? What was his fault? During his visit to Antioch, and while he was thus mingling freely with the Gentile converts, some members of the church at Jerusalem came up to the former city. These men, still influenced by the old leaven of Jewish exclusiveness, evinced much interest in observing how St. Peter, the "apostle of the circumcision," would conduct himself in such new company. Peter, feeling himself thus watched, drew back, afraid. He withdrew, and separated himself from the Gentiles before his Jewish brethren. St. Paul characterizes this conduct as not walking "uprightly according to the truth of the gospel," and as dissembling.* This was Peter's error. It consisted especially of two things, vacillation and dissimulation.

We are ready to ask, as we see Peter withdrawing from full communion with the Gentiles, Is this the man who had been chosen by God, as the instrument of opening the kingdom of Christ to these very people; who spoke so generously, decidedly, and wisely in the council at Jerusalem? Is this he who boldly declared that the Gentile heart, as truly as the Jewish heart, was to be purified by faith; and who had been a party to the decree that circumcision was not to be insisted on in the case of Gentile converts? Yet now he hesitates, and holds back from full fellow-

* Gal. ii. 13, 14.

ship with the Gentiles. He might, indeed, still have doubts on some points unsolved ; but he knew enough, judging from his own statements, to lead to decisive conduct in such a case as this. Yet he vacillated, tried to take both sides, wished to please his friends, and manifested conduct unworthy of himself as a Christian, a teacher, and an apostle. But there was more than vacillation : there was dissimulation ; that is, doing one thing and thinking another ; covering up conviction by a conduct opposed to it. The apostle Paul calls it by this name. The charge is a serious one from such a quarter, and against such a man. Peter feared the Jews—feared lest they should think hardly or unkindly of him if they saw him eating with Gentiles—feared lest his countrymen should be offended, when they knew that he encouraged or abetted the unreserved intercourse of Christian Jews and Gentiles ; and in order to save himself, and to avoid giving offence, he “dissembled,” pretending to have only a partial fellowship with the Gentile converts, and withdrew from open and full communion with them. Thus he was guilty of a most unhallowed compromise of principle. He had delivered sentiments in the council at Jerusalem which should have prevented such conduct ; he had received a Divine lesson on this very subject, and the opinion then forced upon him doubtless remained unchanged. Nothing was to be held common or unclean. Yet he shrunk from fully carrying out this lesson. He sacrificed his conscience, for the moment, to his fears.

But we may consider a little more narrowly the character of this fault of Peter. It was a practical error ; an error in conduct, not in doctrine. Peter

taught correctly, but acted the part of weakness when he suffered himself to be intimidated by the Jews. Had he adopted erroneous views, and promulgated them, the case would have been very different. Moreover the fault was a personal one. He erred in this case as a man, not as an apostle. The distinction is important. "The fear of man bringeth a snare," and in this case it operated injuriously on Peter. Is it not remarkable that he, the "Rock-man," should again be overcome with fear, as he was when he denied his Lord? His conduct, however, weak and unworthy as it was, did not compromise his official character. The New Testament nowhere represents the apostles as men impeccable or infallible: when they spoke or acted in their apostolic character they were under special Divine guidance, and then only. In some respects this error on the part of Peter was scarcely to be wondered at, viewing it from the human side, and especially in connexion with his natural temperament and previous history. He shrunk from the excitement which his communion with the Gentiles would be sure to stir up at Jerusalem. It might lead to division in the church; it would certainly tend to weaken his authority; so that his influence amongst his countrymen might be damaged or diminished. Hence he yielded once again to fear.

There is something, perhaps, to be said for him by way of palliation, but nothing in justification of his conduct, for it was dangerous to the very cause to which he had given his life. Its consequences, of which probably he did not think, might have been very injurious to the interests of Christianity and the infant church. His conduct in this case had a natural

tendency to lead the Jews to think that his opinions and those of Paul were different, and to make the Gentiles suppose that he had changed his views. The idea of such division or difference among the apostles could not fail, if it got any footing in the opinions of men, to be hurtful to that cause for which they both lived and laboured. And then, how many looked up to Peter! how many minds could he influence! how many would be disposed to follow him! We find, in fact, that on this occasion his conduct did influence others. The Jewish converts at Antioch went along with him; and even the excellent Barnabas, a "good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith," was carried away with the dissimulation.* Such conduct, therefore, was likely to be highly injurious; and Paul, seeing that it was calculated to misrepresent the true gospel of Christ, at once condemned it, and withstood Peter "to the face, because he was to be blamed."

It is well for us to remember that Paul in this case was placed in circumstances peculiarly trying. He was not originally one of the twelve: he had come into the apostleship as "one born out of due time."† Yet the matter was one which deeply concerned him as the apostle of the Gentiles, and it behoved him to act with firmness and decision. There seems to have been some meeting of both the parties in this question; or it may be that Paul went to a meeting of Jewish converts at which Peter was present. There, he says, he withstood Peter "to the face, because he was to be blamed." He did not maintain silence under such an error, as if he had been afraid of Peter

* Acts xi. 24; Gal. ii. 13.

† 1 Cor. xv. 8.

as a superior. He was not awed by the example of so great an apostle into the silent sanction of what he thought wrong; nor did he oppose Peter by secret insinuation, or by speaking evil of him in his absence: he avowed to himself his dissatisfaction with his conduct, and faithfully rebuked him. Paul's rebuke was public: he spoke to Peter before them all. The error had been publicly committed; its consequences were of solemn and serious public concern; and a merely private remonstrance would not have met the grave demands of the case. Paul felt that he ought to speak out, and that the rebuke ought to be public, in order that all who might be influenced by Peter's weak and mistaken conduct should know the truth. There can be no doubt that such public reproof of Peter must have been a very painful and trying duty. Yet Paul felt it needful to be done, and he withstood him to the face "before them all." If the case had been one of mere private difference between Peter and Paul, the latter would not have dealt with it as he did.

We can hardly doubt that Paul's rebuke was convincing. It was sustained by quiet, temperate argument, which could not fail to make a deep impression on the minds of those who heard it. He showed that the law of Moses had now nothing more to do in the matter of justification or as a ground of acceptance with God. To prove this he appealed to the Christian's identity with his Lord in his relation to the law, and spoke as if from his own position and experience: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." He closed his argument and appeal by the striking statement, "If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead

in vain :” if circumcision or any other outward observance is necessary to salvation, then Christ has not redeemed us, and we are not free. This was his emphatic conclusion ; so that if Peter’s conduct was right, and there yet remained a distinction between Jew and Greek, or any necessity for laying on the Gentile the ritual of the Jew, then the gospel was not really a system of liberty and complete salvation.

Peter unhappily had been accustomed to rebukes ; but he was so good a man, and so true a disciple of Christ, that he was not offended when admonished that he had done wrong. Excitable as he was in temperament, there is no evidence that on this occasion he became angry, or resisted the reproof of Paul. The case was so plain that he received the rebuke in good part, and evidently with an acknowledgment that Paul was right, and that he himself was wrong. He cherished no bitter feeling towards his fellow apostle for thus publicly and severely withstanding him. On the contrary, we find that, years afterwards, in referring to the writings and the epistles of the very man who thus publicly rebuked him, he speaks of him as “ our beloved brother Paul.”* This was very beautiful, and characteristic of a truly Christian spirit. Hence, while we have seen Peter’s natural weakness once more evidenced by his conduct at Antioch, we cannot fail also to see and admire how truly he tried to cherish the spirit and follow the course of his Lord and Master. Through this new failure he doubtless rose to higher holiness, deeper humility, and still greater usefulness.

* 2 Pet. iii. 15.

Various important practical lessons are suggested or taught by this narrative.

It supplies an evidence of the truth of the gospel history. The impartiality manifested in recording the occasional errors and faults of the apostles themselves is a strong proof of authenticity. In any case of imposture, if the leaders happen to disagree, the imposition is almost sure to be detected. One or other will turn "king's evidence," as we might say, and proclaim the deception. But although two apostles for a short time disagree ; although the one may have to reprove the other in a sharp and decided manner, there was no fraud to disclose, no falsehood or deception to unfold. They had nothing to tell against each other. Their disagreement did not affect their sacred work, nor did it hinder the triumph of their cause.

The fact which has now been before us shows the great importance of Christian consistency. This is important in all, but especially in those who occupy any prominent position in the church. The world justly looks for unmistakable consistency in them. It is wrong, it is injurious, and it may be disastrous to souls, to teach or to profess one thing and to act another. The world judges of religion by what it sees in the conduct of its professors, and especially of its ministers. Nothing, therefore, can be of higher importance than Christian consistency. The stumbling-block which inconsistency puts before the unbelieving and thoughtless is often grievous, and hurtful to their spiritual interests, leading them to deeper practical indifference or to more decided unbelief.

We see here also the danger of mere worldly wisdom in the great business of religion. Any attempt at

compromise with the world can only issue in dishonour and shame. The words of Christ are still true, that we cannot serve God and Mammon. If there be a Divine or righteous principle to guide our conduct, we should always abide by it, and never allow any mere expediency to put it aside. Yet, alas! in the conduct of many the course of expediency often takes the place of principle and duty. It may seem to be expedient to be silent, when principle requires us to speak out; or to take no side in some religious question, when principle demands decision. But such time-serving policy in the affairs of the soul, and in its relation to God, is most unworthy, weak, and dangerous.

Further, this narrative exemplifies and illustrates the faithfulness of true friendship. Such friendship will never be disposed to fawn upon its object, or to flatter it. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend."* The very test of true friendship may be in reproof when needed; and the highest evidence that we seek a friend's true welfare and happiness may be faithful rebuke. And if we ourselves should be the subjects of reproof, the test of our sincerity will be in our receiving the admonitions of friendship in gratitude and love. Thus Paul rebuked Peter: thus Peter received the rebuke of Paul.

Finally, we see the necessity that may arise for checking and refuting religious error. Some think it is a matter of small importance what a man believes. They agree with the poet, who says,—

"For modes of faith let senseless zealots fight :
He can't be wrong whose life is in the right."

* Prov. xxvii. 6.

But that life cannot be right which is based on wrong views of God's character and dealings. For a true life it is essential that a man love God and be at peace with him ; but no man can really love God who does not see God as his reconciled Father, and trust him as his Friend. Hence much depends on true doctrine—on that which shows the moral harmony of God's perfections, and declares his glory in pardoning sin. Theological error may disturb a man's peace, may lead him away from the true foundation of hope, and prove injurious to his spiritual interests, just as poison may disturb health and destroy physical life. Hence the Christian should always seek to be "valiant for the truth," and to "contend earnestly," yet in love, "for the faith which was once delivered to the saints."* Conduct or doctrine which would lead men astray is to be condemned. It is necessary now as of old "to take heed" "unto the doctrine," and to "hold fast the form of sound words."† The welfare of souls, the glory of God, and the regeneration of the world, are connected with "the glorious gospel" earnestly held, faithfully proclaimed, and practically embodied in the lives of Christians.

* Jude 3.

† 1 Tim. iv. 16; 2 Tim. i. 13.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CATHOLIC EPISTLES OF PETER.

Peter as an Evangelist—Where he laboured—The Christians to whom he addressed his Epistles—The object of his first Epistle—To establish converts in the faith—To comfort them under suffering—Practical exhortations—Influence of the Epistle—Pliny's letter to Trajan from Bithynia—The second Epistle—Not at first unanimously received—Written at the close of life—Hortatory errors condemned—False teaching exposed—Growth in grace urged—Glory to Christ.

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ : Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.”—1 *Pet.* i. 1, 2.

“This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you ; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance : that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour.” 2 *Pet.* iii. 1, 2.

THE CATHOLIC EPISTLES OF PETER.

FROM the time of his appearance at Antioch, when St. Paul met him under the circumstances which have been considered, we depend on scanty hints in some of the Epistles, and on ecclesiastical tradition, for further notices of Peter. The words of St. Paul, "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?"* evidently imply, that Peter travelled as an evangelist, and took his wife with him; but in what part of the Roman empire we know not. If the Babylon which is alluded to in 1 Peter v. 13 is to be understood literally—and there is no sufficient reason why it should not—we have a glimpse of him beyond the boundaries of the Roman empire, pursuing his missionary and apostolic career by the waters of Babylon. It was then, in all probability, from the banks of the Euphrates that he addressed his first Epistle, to the Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor from the region of Pontus down to the shores of the Ægean Sea. The churches of the Lesser Asia were, probably, for the most part composed of Gentile converts, although there must have been also a large number of Jewish Christians in them. Some have thought that Peter's design in his Epistles was

* 1 Cor. ix. 5.

exclusively to address the latter ; but this is unnecessarily to limit the purpose and scope of his writings. The direct object of his first Epistle is plainly enough announced by the apostle himself when he says, "I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand."* He sought to confirm his readers in the gospel which they had received, and to strike at the root of that counterfeit Judaistic Christianity which would have made him its apostle. Throughout the Roman empire and its provinces there existed a numerous and rather powerful body, who contemplated the restoration of "the kingdom to Israel" by means of Christianity. These were the Judaizers who were so frequently found in the primitive churches, working evil and disturbing peace, by attempting to make circumcision and the rites of the Mosaic law essential to religion and salvation. The hope of these men seems to have centred in Peter, as "the apostle of the circumcision ;" and they studiously put him forward in opposition to Paul, who was the "apostle of the Gentiles." It appears therefore to have been one great design of Peter, in his first Epistle, to encourage and confirm the Jewish converts in the gospel which they had received from Paul and his companions, and thus "to merge his own individual character and existence, in the career of him whom his own followers would fain represent as his rival and his enemy." By a spirit and phraseology accordant with those of St. Paul, by sending this first Epistle by Paul's companion Silvanus,† and by subsequently giving, in his second Epistle, his deliberate apostolic testimony to the

* 1 Pet. v. 12.

† 1 Pet. v. 12.

wisdom of Paul and the value of his writings,* he endeavoured to crush absolutely and for ever that feeling or sentiment, which sought to separate these two apostles and make them founders of opposing systems.

Another object of this Epistle, and a very important one, was to afford consolation to those who were persecuted for the name of Christ. His repeated references to the example of Jesus in his sufferings and death, and to the future glory and felicity of believers in him, were well calculated to sustain and cheer the minds of those who were suffering from persecution. How cheering to be told that the trial of their faith was "much more precious than of gold that perisheth;" to have their hopes directed to "the grace that was to be brought to them at the revelation of Jesus Christ;" to be reminded of their dignity as "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation;" and to be assured that here, amidst the perils and persecutions to which they were exposed, "the eyes of the Lord were ever over" them, and "his ears open to their prayer," and that he constantly cared for them with a tender and fatherly care.

The Epistle abounds also in practical exhortations to the disciples of Christ to "abstain from fleshly lusts," to have "their conversation honest among the Gentiles," to submit to all constituted authorities, and to show among themselves mutual love, sympathy, and kindness; that by holy, meek, and consistent conduct they might glorify God, and "by well doing put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." The great doctrines of the gospel are clearly and explicitly

* 2 Pet. iii. 15, 16.

taught ; special emphasis is laid on the sacrifice and sufficiency of the Lord Jesus ; and the holy influence of the truth is earnestly insisted on in the hearts and lives of all who receive and profess it. He gives injunctions bearing on the various relations of life and of human society, urging on husbands, wives, and servants, and on all men towards their rulers and towards each other, their respective duties, encompassing all with the sacred obligation to imitate the example and walk in the footsteps of Christ.

The Epistle is well described by Archbishop Leighton as a "brief, yet very clear summary both of the consolations and instructions needful for the encouragement and direction of a Christian in his journey to heaven, elevating his thoughts and desires to that happiness, and strengthening him against all opposition in the way, both that of corruption within and temptations and afflictions from without. The heads of doctrine contained in it are many ; but the main that are insisted on are these three : *faith*, *obedience*, and *patience* ; to establish them in believing, to direct them in doing, and to comfort them in suffering."*

We have evidence, if not of the direct effect or influence of this Epistle, yet of the virtuous course and holy conduct of one of the churches to whom it was addressed. Pliny the Younger, who, A.D. 105, was Proconsul of Bithynia, not knowing how to deal with the Christians in that province, wrote a letter to the Emperor Trajan, desiring to be informed

* Leighton's Commentary on First Epistle of Peter, under chap. i. ver. 1.

in what way he should treat them. In this letter he bears testimony to their blameless lives, the purity of their religious worship, their meeting together on a certain day of the week, their adoration of Jesus Christ as God, and their resolution or oath not to be thieves, or murderers, or evil-doers; so that by their conduct, so quiet and so holy, we learn that they disarmed the suspicions of the Proconsul and of his imperial master.* We may well believe that such instructions, counsels, and consolations as Peter conveyed, would tend to produce fruits like these in all the churches which his Epistle reached.

Peter's second Epistle is one of those which, until the end of the fourth century, were placed among the *Antilegomena*, or writings of doubtful authority. It is not here either our province or purpose to enter into the grounds alleged against its authenticity, nor, on the other hand, to show in critical detail the reasons why we believe it to be genuine and authentic. The points of resemblance between it and the former Epistle are so many and manifest, that identity of authorship cannot successfully be denied; while any differences in style and structure between the two Epistles are satisfactorily accounted for by the length of time that elapsed between the dates at which they were respectively written. The second Epistle was evidently written at an advanced period of the apostle's life, in his old age, and when he was expecting his decease.† It is full of faithful warning and loving admonition, and shows, throughout, an earnest desire to build up the readers in their most holy faith, with

* Pliny's Epistles, bk. x. 97.

† 2 Pet. i. 14.

reference especially to certain forms of error in doctrine and in practice which had then begun to appear and give signs of growing influence. In opposition to these errors, and in strong contrast with them, the apostle places "the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"—an expression which occurs four times in this brief Epistle.* This knowledge, in Peter's opinion and experience, was the central point of the Christian life, the living source of Christian virtue, and the only means of entrance into the everlasting kingdom of God. And the apostle urges the Christian disciples to advance in their spiritual life, and make higher spiritual attainments, as the only effectual safeguard against apostasy; closing his Epistle and crowning his counsels with the exhortation, to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." The facts of sacred history, in the destruction of the world by the flood, and the overthrow of the cities of the plain, are used to prove God's retributive justice, and to show that the presumptuous, impure, and impenitent cannot expect to escape the condemnation of Jehovah.

The dangers to be dreaded from false teaching are distinctly pointed out; the terrible character and doom of apostates are declared; a glimpse is given into the future regarding the issue of all material things, and the "coming of the day of God;" believers are warned to live in the present "in all holy conversation and godliness," with a view to the solemnities of judgment and the realities of eternity;

* 2 Pet. i. 2 and 8; ii. 20; iii. 18.

and, with the assurance that the second coming of the Lord, though long delayed, is as certain as the fact of the Deluge, all are urged to account his long suffering to be salvation, and to beware of "being led away with the error of the wicked."

In both Epistles we see reflected the apostle's devotion to his Lord, his practical piety, his holy activity, and his glorious hope. He who, in loving impatience, cast himself into the sea to reach his Master on the shore,* is also the man who most earnestly testifies to the hope of his return. With affectionate earnestness he exhorts his readers to raise their thoughts above their present trials to the future glory, and in view of it to stand fast and firm amidst all temptation and suffering. With the assurance which had been given him that he should die the death of a martyr, he sought to realize for himself, and to prove to others, that suffering for Christ was a privilege, an honour, and a blessing. How truly did he thus fulfil his Lord's command, given him in the anticipation of his mournful fall, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."† How fully, affectionately, and faithfully, in these writings, did he carry out the twofold injunction of the Saviour in one of his last interviews with him on earth—"Feed my lambs: shepherd my sheep"‡—words which he never forgot, and which he constantly sought to embody in his apostolic character and career. The growing and deepening feeling of his soul during his whole future course, is expressed in the closing words of the second Epistle. We value the last words of great men,

* John xxi. 7.

† Luke xxii. 32.

‡ John xxi. 15--17.

as generally sincere, impressive, and solemn: Peter's last precept to the disciples whom he addressed is, "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;" and his last written testimony is to the dignity and Divinity of his Lord in the doxology: "To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen."



CHAPTER XVII.

PETER'S ANTICIPATION OF DECEASE.

Traditions regarding Peter—Here we see him near his end—The ruling purpose of his life strong even in old age—His view of death—A dissolution—A departure—Will not destroy man—Will not change character—Peter's language suggests a glorious enfranchisement after death—The prospect of a permanent home—The beauties of this world—Yet not to be compared with the Christian's future home—Peter's desire in the prospect of his decease—Worthy of imitation—Martyrdom—Legend of a vision of his Lord—Triumph.

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest : but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.”—*John* xxi. 18, 19.

“Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance ; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.”—2 *Pe.* i. 13—15

PETER'S ANTICIPATION OF DECEASE.

THUS far we have been enabled, from the New Testament, to trace the character and history of the apostle Peter. For information regarding the remainder of his life we have no inspired documents, and no certain authority on which to depend. According to the generally received opinion, he lived and laboured for twenty years after the meeting which he had with Paul at Antioch ; but where these years were chiefly spent we have no sure means of knowing. Ecclesiastical tradition asserts that he performed an extensive apostolic and missionary tour throughout those regions where the Christian converts lived, to whom his Epistles were addressed. Another tradition intimates that the apostle, towards the close of his life, visited Rome, and became bishop of the church in that city, and that he suffered martyrdom there in the persecution raised against the Christians by the Emperor Nero. But Peter, though he possibly did visit Rome, could only have been there for a short time ; and there is no evidence whatever that he was at any time bishop of the church in that city.*

We are, in his second Epistle, introduced to him

* For a fuller discussion of this question, see Appendix B, at the end of volume.

in his old age, when he was near the end of his earthly pilgrimage, and in the immediate prospect of his departure to another world. It is interesting and instructive to see how such a man felt, and thought, and acted, with this prospect before him. All of us must die, although all may not live to be old ; and it is well for us to see how an apostle could think and write of his decease.

The ruling purpose and guiding principle of Peter's life were still strong and triumphant, even when hoary hairs were upon him, and under the infirmities of age. "Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance." There was no cessation of labour, no retirement from duty, no easy self-indulgence, so long as he was "in this tabernacle." He wished to "bring forth fruit in old age ;" to be "like a green olive tree in the house of God"* and the church of Christ. His old age was thus active, useful, and unselfish. As long as he could help others, and influence them for good, or, by counsel, example, and experience, could healthfully and spiritually stir up their minds, he wished to continue in the full service of the Master to whom he had given his life. Thus the end of his career would be better than the beginning. Sometimes we hear good men say, as years multiply and infirmities grow upon them, "We are old, and must retire ; we have borne the burden and heat of the day : let us have rest and quiet now, and let others come to take our places and do our work." Peter did not feel thus : he thought it meet, as long as he was in the body, to continue at his work, and do what he could for the

* Ps. xcii. 14 ; lii. 8.

cause of Christ. Advancing age and the prospect of decease should make the disciples of Christ still more devoted ; should increase their zeal for the glory of their Lord, and their desire to be useful to their fellow men. They may not be equal to all the physical activity or exertion of former years, but with enriched experience they will be able in many ways to stir up the minds of others, and to stimulate their zeal. There are few things more attractive or beautiful than a ripe, holy, and useful old age, in the church of God. Peter's zeal and devotedness continued unabated to the last, and adorned his declining years.

Very striking and beautiful are his views and feelings in the contemplation of death. He speaks of it as a putting off of this tabernacle ; as a decease, or, as the word means, an exodus or departure from this world. This had no terror to him : he could speak of it calmly and confidently ; and there can be no doubt he thought of it joyfully and hopefully. He says that his Lord had given him some previous intimation that the end of his earthly history was drawing near. Whether he had received any new revelation on this matter, we do not know ; but we remember that the Saviour had announced both the manner and the period of this apostle's decease, and had told him that he would die by violence when he was old. This communication, "signifying by what death he should glorify God,"* had been made to him on the occasion when Jesus asked him three times, "Lovest thou me?" Peter now felt that his end could not be far off. Yet, with the prospect of such a death of suffer-

* John xxi. 18, 19.

ing before him, he did not shrink, for he did not fear it. There is something sublime in a man with intelligent confidence anticipating his decease, and with holy calmness making preparations for it. It is not with the notion of being ready for a leap in the dark, or on the stoical principle of meeting bravely what cannot be avoided ; but on the Christian principle of preparing for a journey to a better land, and preparing for it not only without fear or doubt, but with hopeful assurance and joy. In walking through a cemetery, we may sometimes find a vault or grave prepared, with the name of the proprietor upon it, when we know that he is still alive ; a resting-place provided, where his earthly tabernacle may be laid when he is called to put it off. To the Christian death is but the gateway of life ; so that he need not shrink from it : to die will be gain unspeakable to him.

But the apostle's words contain more explicit teaching regarding the true idea of death. He speaks of it as a mere dissolution of the earthly dwelling. When we die we only put off our tabernacle, we only lay aside the clay tenement in which the soul resides here. That within us which constitutes our true self is not dissolved, and does not die. The apostle speaks of his decease as merely the putting off, or dissolution, of the outer shell. Death has dominion over the physical and material frame, but it does not touch the inhabitant that dwells within. The doctrine of materialism is utterly opposed to this Christian and apostolic estimate of death. And, whatever some philosophers may urge, men generally will never be persuaded that the strength of manhood, in its true life and nobleness, is material. Yet even the Scrip-

tural view of death, as a dissolution or separation, if it were seriously entertained, would be painful to the multitudes who live only for this world and for themselves in it. The body, in some aspect of its propensities or wants, may be the chief object of their care; or the soul may be sunk in the flesh; so that death will be to them terrible desolation. To the Christian it is otherwise. His happiness is based on his standing and acceptance in Christ, and his peace is such as the world can neither give nor take away; so that death cannot injure his true life, or darken his prospect, or interrupt his enjoyment.

Death is presented here, too, as a decease, or departure from earthly scenes. The apostle speaks of it as an exodus—a going out and a going away. It is a journey from this world to another, which is as yet untried, and in a great measure unknown. It is a passage out of time into eternity, an exit from the seen to the unseen. Peter had nothing to fear even in this view of it; for he knew whom he had believed; he knew that his Lord was “the Resurrection and the Life;” he knew that in his Father’s house were many mansions, and that there was one prepared for him. So those who have laid up treasure in heaven, who are rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom of God, have nothing to fear in departing from this world. The change will be blessed and glorious to them. But those whose hopes and hearts, whose desires and prospects, are all bound up in this world, can have no comfort or pleasure in the idea of death as a departure from the pursuits of time. No: they are dependent for enjoyment on outward and material things; they lay up treasure here; they chiefly or

exclusively seek the joys and pleasures of this world, and to depart hence will be to leave their happiness behind them, and to leave it for ever.

The apostle's language shows some other aspects of death. We see, from his assertion regarding himself, that death will not destroy man. How clearly is the "I," in the words of Peter, different from the "tabernacle" which he was soon to put off. The dissolution of the one will be no dissolution of the other. The "I" flourishes even when the tabernacle decays; the "I" goes to the God of the spirits of men, and leaves the body behind to return to its kindred dust and see corruption. Such indeed is all which the power of death can do: it cannot touch our true being. Men seek death, sometimes, that they may forget their anguish or flee from care and woe. How tremendous the delusion; for life after death is a still more momentous reality!

Peter's idea suggests further, that death will not change the character. To put off the tabernacle is not to lay aside old habits of thought and feeling. We retain our character even in removing from one world to another. The elements and qualities of moral character are unaffected by mere physical causes. No accident to a man's body can violate the integrity of truthfulness, or diminish the beauty of holiness, or quench the fire of love. Nor will death do so. Our relation to all material things may be changed by our decease, but character will suffer no change in passing from the present world to the next. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is

holy, let him be holy still."* In the possession of holiness, therefore, and in God-likeness, there is a treasure which time cannot waste, and which the dissolution of the body cannot destroy. What, then, has the Christian to fear from death? Nothing, literally nothing; but much to hope for. It cannot prove a loss to his true being: it will certainly prove an unspeakable gain. On the other hand, if our happiness is all in the present state, if this world bounds our desires and hopes, to depart will be misery unutterable. Hence, as we sow now, we must reap hereafter. "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."†

The expressions which Peter uses regarding his decease give us to see something also of his prospect after death. It was the prospect of a glorious emancipation. In this life he was in a tabernacle, confined in a kind of prison-house. The soul, acting here through the bodily organs, is often painfully conscious of the manner in which the body hampers its energies and clogs its aspirations. It is frequently found true, that the spirit is willing while the flesh is weak. Faintness, giddiness, pain, or other bodily sensations, may interfere with the strength and activity of the mind. Shut up in this frail and fleshly body, we are excluded from much knowledge that the soul would otherwise possess. Now we know only in part: "now we see through a glass, darkly."‡ What a wonderful expansion will there be when we put off this tabernacle of clay! Then will be realized a glorious enlargement and invigoration of our whole being.

* Rev. xxii. 11.

† Gal. vi. 8.

‡ 1 Cor. xiii. 9—12.

"It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when Christ shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."* Here the body, with its limit and its location, its feebleness, corruptibility, and frailty, comes between us and higher knowledge, higher life, and higher joy; but hereafter there will be no such hindrance in our course. That which is in part shall then be done away. What liberty of thought, what grasp of knowledge, what loftiness of devotion, what gushing of love, what activity of service, will then be reached! We see the insect crawling, to-day a caterpillar; but how soon it becomes a beautiful, bright, and joyous thing of life, "a flying flower, a living gem!" More marvellous, we doubt not, will be the enlargement of the Christian's being when he puts off this tabernacle.

"Does death e'er alarm you?

Death is the brother of Love, and twin brother is he, and is only
More austere to behold. With a kiss upon lips that are fading,
Takes he the soul, and departs; and, rocked in the arms of affection,
Places the ransomed soul, new-born, 'fore the face of its Father.
Sounds of his coming already I hear—see dimly his pinions,
Sweet as the night, but with stars strewn upon them! I fear not before him:
Death is only release."

Moreover, Peter speaks of death so as to suggest the prospect of a permanent home. A tabernacle is not an abiding or durable building. The present tent-life is not to continue. The earthly house of this tabernacle must be dissolved. Here the apostle felt himself but a stranger and pilgrim: his departure from time and the world was to be an exodus for a permanent home, a mansion amongst the many in his Father's house above. In this world the Christian

* 1 John iii. 2.

has no continuing city nor place of abode: he seeks one to come, an abiding home, a kingdom which cannot be moved, a city which hath foundations. "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."* Until the Christian dies he cannot reach his celestial home, and is here only on the way to it. And what a home will that be! I have "a desire to depart," says St. Paul, "and to be with Christ; which is far better."† Christ is the light, the joy, and the glory of that heavenly abode. We cannot be insensible to the attractions and beauties of this earth, and may sympathize with the poet who sings—

"This world is very beautiful :
My God, I thank thee that I live."

Manifold and thrilling are the fair scenes and sublimities of nature. As we stand upon some eminence, and see the wealth of beauty scattered around us, in hill and dale, in the blue sky and the floating clouds that temper the noontide heat, the verdant foliage and the fragrant flowers, the murmuring brooks and pleasant fields, with all nature clad in loveliness and smiling sweetness before us; or, as we stand upon a cliff when the sun sinks in the west, and the shades of darkness begin to fall, and night comes on unveiling the stars in their celestial glory; or when we can see the moonbeams play, and the shadows chase each other, on the bosom of the "deep blue sea," whose ripple on the shore is as music to the soul,—we are filled with admiration and joy. How wonderful this earth, and how beautiful too! but it is nothing

* 2 Cor. v. 1.

† Phil. i. 23.

to the resplendent and abiding home to which the Christian is journeying.

“These trees are not the trees that grow in beauty by the side
Of that bright flood whose living streams through sinless regions glide :
We see not here th’ immortal fruit, the fadeless flowers that bloom
On hills of light, in vales of peace, at our bright Eden home.”

This world, in its present aspect, is not the Christian’s permanent dwelling place. At death he has to leave it for the “city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God ;” that city which has “no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it :” because the glory of God lightens it, “and the Lamb is the light thereof.”* Hence, as we advance in time, our souls should be ever looking upward, and clinging less and less to this world, which must so soon be left. This short and changing life may be to us as the first step of a ladder, the top of which is lost amidst the transcendent glories of heaven. Blessed are those who through grace are enabled to make it so.

It is instructive to notice the desire which Peter cherished in the prospect of his decease. “Moreover,” he says, “I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.” He wished to be useful after he was dead and gone, by leaving a testimony behind him which might help to guide others to happiness and glory. And so it has been ; for he, “being dead, yet speaketh.” For eighteen hundred years his Epistles have been shining as a light in the firmament of revelation, and are shining still. They have helped many souls, in the battle of life, to spiritual victory, and cheered them on their way to immortality. Thus the apostle

* Heb. xi. 10 ; Rev. xxi. 23.

desired to leave the world better than he found it, and to bequeath some good which, as a monument, might strengthen and encourage other pilgrims in their journey to the heavenly country. It was surely a noble ambition, well worthy of the devout and hearty imitation of every disciple of the Lord. How different was it from the ordinary objects of human ambition. Many seek to live for themselves; to gain honours, secure influence, amass riches, and to get from the world all that they can, with little or no thought of making it better for their being in it. They may desire a name for themselves, and wish to be held in remembrance after they die: but their memory and their name may soon be gone, and even gladly forgotten. Men may not care to think of them when they have passed away. It is blessed to live so as to leave a testimony behind us for Christ; to live so as to speak for him even after we are dead; to live so that the world may be the better for our pilgrimage through it; and that our memory may be gratefully cherished when we die. The influence and example of some men live for evil long after they are dead; but Peter wished to be a holy light and a power for good, in the world and the church below, even after he had left them. He had his wish, and now he has his reward.

Tradition tells us that he suffered martyrdom in the persecution waged by Nero at Rome.* An interesting though unhistorical legend has come down to us regarding his last hours. When he was daily expecting to suffer for Christ, the disciples in Rome urged him to escape, and save himself for the good of

* See Appendix, Note B.

the church. At first he decidedly refused, thinking that it would reflect upon his courage and constancy, and perhaps cause others to stumble at the prospect of suffering for Jesus ; but the prayers and tears of the Christians at length overcame him, and he yielded. Accordingly, on the following night, after taking farewell of the brethren, he succeeded in escaping from the prison ; and when he came to the gate of the city, in the Appian Way, he is there said to have had a vision of his risen Lord. On beholding him, Peter asked him, "Lord, whither goest thou?" to which the Saviour replied, "I am come to Rome, to be crucified a second time." The apostle at once felt himself reproved : he perceived that Jesus meant that he was to be crucified in his servant. Peter immediately went back to the prison, and delivered himself into the hands of his keepers. When he was brought out for crucifixion, it is alleged, that he asked the officers that he might not be crucified in the ordinary way, but fastened to the cross with his head downwards ; avowing himself unworthy to suffer in the same posture as his Lord had suffered before him. Thus in his old age he followed Christ his Master to the cross, and through the cross to heaven. Often had he occasion to weep over his weakness here, sometimes to weep bitterly : the more exultingly now he adores ; for "sorrow and sighing are for ever fled away."

Reader, let us seek to meet him and all "the holy company of the apostles and the noble army of martyrs" in that abiding and resplendent home from which there will be no departure any more for ever. "Yet there is room," and the way is open—that "new and living way" of which Peter speaks in the

glorious fact that Christ "once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." In becoming dead to sins and alive unto righteousness through faith in Him "who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree," we reach the bright and blessed hope that, "when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, we shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."



APPENDIX.

NOTE A.

"I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." Few passages in the New Testament have been the subject of keener critical discussion or sharper ecclesiastical controversy than this. One set of interpreters, on the ground of our Lord's words, claim for Peter an exclusive and mysterious supremacy in the church : another class, seeing the error and superstition that have gathered round Peter's name, have so interpreted the language as to exclude all personal reference to this apostle. The chief opinions on this question may be classified under three divisions.

1. The term Rock is referred to Christ himself ; as if our Lord had said, "Thou art Peter, and upon the rock which thou hast confessed I will build my church." This was the opinion of St. Augustine, who says, "*Super hanc Petram, quam confessus es, super meipsum filium Dei vivi, ædificabo ecclesiam meam. Super me ædificabo te, non me super te*" (*De Verbis Dom.*, serm. xiii.) This interpretation was adopted by Jerome, and has been held by many other eminent commentators, both ancient and modern.

2. The Rock is referred to Peter's confession ; as if our Lord had said, "Upon this thy confession, this the doctrine concerning me which thou hast acknowledged, I will build my church." Many of the fathers adopted this view, and it appears to have been the opinion of Luther. But the remarks of Dean Alford in his Greek New Testament, suffice to show that this interpretation is untenable. According to the usage of the New Testament writers, it is not doctrines or confessions that are designated as foundations or pillars, but persons, living men. In proof of this refer to Eph. ii. 19, 20 : "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God ; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone :" and to the words of Peter himself,

1 Epist. ii. 5: "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house," &c. (See also Gal. ii. 9.)

3. The terms are referred to Peter himself as the rock on which the church was to be built. There are two aspects of this interpretation, very different from each other. (1) There is the Romish or Popish view, maintained by Baronius and Bellarmin; namely, that Peter was invested with a peculiar and permanent primacy in the church. (2) The other view, which I think is the true one,* is that which refers the words to Peter, but only to his personal position in the first building of the Christian church, and which finds their fulfilment in the fact that Peter was the first to preach the gospel to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, and subsequently the first to preach it to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius; thus in reality instrumentally forming the Christian church, and opening it to Jews and Gentiles alike.

There are some other views of the text which are not included in this threefold division: such as that which makes the words of Christ applicable to the other apostles and to all believers alike; and the opinion that our Lord refers to what may be called "the Petrine characteristic of the church, namely, *faithfulness of confession*, as first distinctly exhibited by Peter:" but these have not been widely entertained. Out of seventy-seven opinions of the most famous fathers and writers in the church, Lannoy, a Doctor of the Sorbonne, says that he found forty-four interpreting the words as referring to the faith or confession of Peter, sixteen applying them to Christ, and seventeen finding their application in Peter as the rock. Christ is the only *causal* foundation, and the chief corner stone of the church. Peter was honoured as the instrument to begin the building, and the reference of our Lord's words to him can only be to his special call and work as an apostle. But, as the thoughtful Bengel justly asks, "Quid hoc ad Romam?"—"What have these things to do with Rome?" In the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles, there is no trace to be found of any such supremacy as Romanists ascribe to Peter, but many evidences of the contrary; and by Peter himself most clearly disavowed (1 Pet. v. 1—3). Moreover, part of the words addressed to Peter by our Lord on this occasion, implying apostolic authority in what is called "the power of the keys," were subsequently addressed on two occasions to all the apostles (Matt. xviii. 18; John xx. 23).

* The first interpretation is that which has been adopted in other publications of the Religious Tract Society: see especially the Commentary from Henry and Scott, and the Annotated Paragraph Bible, *in loc.*, where the reasons for preferring this interpretation will be found.

NOTE B

The question as to Peter's residence in Rome, and his connexion with the church in that city, is one of much historical interest and importance, and deserves more lengthened consideration than could be given to it in the body of this work. Three different opinions have been maintained on the point. It is alleged by some, and especially by Roman Catholic ecclesiastical historians and divines, that Peter was for twenty-five years in Rome, and that he was bishop of the church there; it is denied by others that he was ever at Rome at all; while it is admitted by a third class of writers that the apostle may possibly have gone to Rome a short time before his death, and may have suffered martyrdom there, but it is denied that he ever was bishop of the church in that city, or that he resided there for any considerable time. The last, which is a sort of *via media*, seems to me the safest and the most probable opinion. The first opinion is founded on a tradition given to us by Eusebius, that Peter went to Rome in the time of the Emperor Claudius (A.D. 42), to meet Simon Magus, who was leading many astray; that he preached the gospel and founded a church there, presided over it as bishop, and suffered martyrdom under Nero (A.D. 67).^{*} From Eusebius, Jerome took this tradition, and since then it has flowed on through church history. It is the view on which rests the primacy of the bishops of Rome; and the doctors of that church have for the most part resolutely maintained it as irrefragable truth. But, so far as the authority of Scripture is concerned, and even so far as all reliable ancient testimony, apart from Scripture, is concerned, the evidence is full and clear that Peter never was bishop of the church in Rome, and that if he suffered martyrdom there he could only have been in that city for a very short time before his death.

In tracing the Scriptural evidence on this question we may begin with the fact of Paul's conversion. When did this take place? It was after the death of Stephen, and during the persecution which raged violently against the Christians both in Palestine and Syria. In this persecution Paul was an active agent, and he had evidently been engaged in this work for some time previous to his memorable journey to Damascus. We may safely conclude that as Tiberius was the declared enemy of the Jews,[†] but cherished a kind feeling towards the Christians on account

^{*} Euseb. Ecclesiast. Hist. bk. ii. chap. xiv. xv.

[†] Tacitus' Annals, ii. 85; Josephus' Antiq. of Jews, bk. xviii. 3—5.

of his veneration for Christ,* this furious persecution of the Christians by the Jews did not take place in the reign of that Emperor. Tiberius died A.D. 37; and allowing some time after this for the exercise of Saul's fury, the raging of the persecution, and the events recorded in Acts viii., we may fix the date of his conversion most probably in A.D. 39. A year or two earlier or later would not affect the general issue of the investigation. Three years after Paul's conversion he went to see Peter, who was then in Jerusalem;† so that the date of this visit was A.D. 42. Up to that time Peter had not left Jerusalem, with the exception of a short visit to Samaria, in company with John, to see the work of God there.‡ After Paul's departure from Jerusalem we are told that "Peter passed throughout all quarters,"§ and find that he traversed a large part of Palestine, preached the gospel to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius at Cæsarea, and subsequently returned to Jerusalem.|| After this the persecution of the church by Herod began. Peter was apprehended at Jerusalem, and put into prison, from which he was released by an angel. Herod finding that Peter had escaped him, ordered his keepers to be put to death, went down to Cæsarea, and there died suddenly in the fourth year of Claudius, A.D. 45.¶ This fixes nearly the date of Peter's escape; so that up to that time he had not permanently left Jerusalem, and could not have gone to Rome, as is alleged, in the second year of the reign of Claudius.

On the apostle's release from his imprisonment we are informed that "he departed, and went into another place;"** but to what place? That he left Jerusalem for a time is clear; but that he went to Rome there is no evidence whatever. On the contrary, we must believe, from his special calling as the apostle of the circumcision,†† that he turned to the East, to preach the gospel to the numerous Jews in that region, rather than to Rome, the chief seat of the Gentiles, where there were then comparatively very few Jews; for they did not spread themselves much in the West till after the destruction of Jerusalem. That he went to preach among the Gentiles is clearly improbable if we admit the force which, in relation generally to Peter's course, is plainly due to the words of St. Paul to the Galatians: "And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision" (Gal. ii. 9). We find Peter again in Jerusalem at the council held there on an appeal

* Tertullian's Apol. chap. v.

† Gal. i. 18.

‡ Acts viii. 14.

§ Acts ix. 30—32.

|| Acts xi. 2.

¶ Josephus' Antiq. of Jews, bk. xix. ch. 8, sec. 2.

** Acts xii. 17.

†† Gal. ii. 7.

from the church at Antioch, touching the question of circumcision, on which occasion all the apostles seem to have met together for the last time; a tolerably clear proof that up to that time, Jerusalem had been the central point to which they always returned after their missionary excursions throughout Palestine. The date of this council is given by St. Paul himself, as fourteen years after his conversion; for the form of the expression seems evidently to indicate that these years are to be reckoned from his conversion as the *terminus a quo*, and not from his first visit to Jerusalem after it.* This would fix the time of the council in A.D. 53, up to which time there is not only no evidence that Peter had never been to Rome, but there is no period of time unaccounted for to allow of his having gone thither.

Some time after the council at Jerusalem we find Peter at Antioch,† where Paul met him, and “withstood him to the face” for his dissimulation in refusing to eat with the Gentiles. After this circumstance we have no further facts in Peter’s history recorded in Scripture; but an allusion to him in Paul’s first Epistle to the Corinthians, written at Ephesus A.D. 57, distinctly implies that up to that time Peter had no fixed place of abode, and was engaged in going about from place to place preaching the gospel:‡ “Have I not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?” There is an expression at the close of Peter’s first Epistle§ which leaves us in no doubt as to his residence when he wrote it: “The church which is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you.” The notion that by Babylon the apostle meant Rome is utterly without foundation, and cannot for a moment be entertained.|| It is opposed to all sound principles of interpretation to find an allegorical meaning in a proper name introduced in the midst of simple matters of fact. Moreover, the countries mentioned in the address of the Epistle, “Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,” are enumerated, not as a person writing in Rome would naturally enumerate them, from west to east, but from east to west and south, as one writing in Babylon would name them. We are led, therefore, to conclude that from Antioch Peter travelled to the east, and from Babylon wrote his first Epistle, which, from internal evidence, according to Professor Wieseler, could not have been written before A.D. 60.¶ We see from all this, that the tradition that Peter was for a quarter of a century Bishop of Rome, is not only without foundation, but absolutely opposed to fact.

* Gal. ii. 1, 2.

† Gal. ii. 11.

‡ 1 Cor. ix. 5.

§ 1 Pet. v. 13.

|| Euseb. Eccles. Hist. ii. 15.

¶ “Journal of Sacred Literature,” vol. v. pp. 314, 315.

By another kind of evidence we can go still further down the apostle's history to show that he had not resided in Rome up to that time. The Epistle to the Romans, according to the agreement of all who have most carefully studied the chronology of St. Paul's life, was written A.D. 58; but it contains no allusion whatsoever to Peter. The absence of any reference to him is quite unaccountable if he had been there at that time, or even if he had laboured in the gospel there previously; and the more unaccountable from the number of affectionate salutations given at the end of the Epistle to members of the Roman church. Paul himself was brought to Rome as a prisoner A.D. 61, and continued for two years there, in his hired house,* "preaching the kingdom of God." Soon after his arrival he called the chief of the Jews together to tell them why he had come to Rome; and their words to him in reply, "We desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest; for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against," manifestly show that the gospel had not up to that time been fully or specially preached to the Jews in Rome. Must we not therefore conclude that Peter, the "apostle of the circumcision," had not been there? The ignorance of these Jews regarding Christianity is altogether inconsistent with the statement that Peter had lived and laboured among them. During St. Paul's imprisonment he wrote the Epistles to the Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Philemon, and most probably the Hebrews (assuming that he was the author of the last), but in none of these is there the slightest allusion to Peter's presence in Rome, or to his having been there. When Paul was released, in A.D. 63, he left Rome; but whether he travelled, as he at one time intended, into Spain,† or eastward to Greece and Asia Minor, we have no certain information. It is probable, indeed, that he accomplished both journeys. In the prospect of release he had expressed his purpose to travel through Macedonia into Asia,‡ and after this he may have gone to Spain. At all events it appears that at Nicopolis, where he had designed to pass the winter,§ he was arrested and sent back to Rome, where he was thrown into prison and treated as a common criminal. It was during this second imprisonment that he wrote his second Epistle to Timothy, in which he complains that many of his old friends had deserted him, and requests Timothy to come to him. Yet in this Epistle, written only a short time before his martyrdom, there is not the slightest allusion to Peter's presence or ministry in Rome. Hence we are compelled to conclude that, if Peter ever was at Rome, it was only

* Acts xxviii. 17—31.

‡ Philem. 22; Phil. ii. 24.

† Rom. xv. 24.

§ Titus iii. 12.

for a short time before his death. This negative argument from Scripture is very weighty, and no amount of mere uncertain tradition can avail to overthrow it. The author of the story of Peter's abode and bishopric at Rome was Papias, whose works have been lost; but his statement, quoted and preserved by Eusebius, came to be generally believed in the Christian church. The testimonies of the fathers who speak of it are in various points contradictory; and the entire silence of others who unquestionably must have spoken of it had it been a fact, surely points to our conclusion that Peter did not found the church at Rome, and never was bishop there. The most important and credible of the ancient testimonies—that of Dionysius of Corinth—places Peter's arrival at Rome not before A.D. 66, and proves that he was not there more than one year before his death.* In the brief interval between the date of Paul's second Epistle to Timothy and his martyrdom, Peter may have come to Rome and died there. But even this cannot be proved. How vain and worthless, then, is the superstructure of ecclesiastical arrogance and superstition which men have sought to rear upon a foundation so uncertain, and, in the larger portion of it, so false.

* "Bibliotheca Sacra," January, 1859. Translation of Ellendorf's *Historico-critical Inquiry*.

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